THE WORD AND THE ROAD

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."—Ps. cxix. 105.

THE WORD AND THE ROAD

A BOOK OF DEVOTIONAL READINGS

BEING

Extracts from the Manuscripts of Sermons

BY THE LATE

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PREFACE

As indicated in the title, this is not a volume of sermons. My husband rarely wrote out his sermons fully. He trusted much to his memory for his illustrations and to the inspiration of the moment for his conclusions. The following are only gleanings gathered from the fields of his ministry. May those who read beat out that which has been gleaned, and find, like Ruth of old, "about an ephah of barley."

A.L.S.

Greenock,

September, 1922.

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THE WORD AND THE ROAD

THREE MEMORABLE MEETINGS

GENESIS XXXII. 1, 6, 24. PSALM XXXIV. 7.

"The angels of God met him." "Esau cometh to meet thee." "There wrestled a man with him."

THIS chapter describes three meetings. First, "the angels of God met Jacob." They do not seem to have done anything particular, as we should say. They simply met him. But the sight of a friendly angel is in itself a blessing. They came forth to welcome Jacob. He had seen them once before, ascending and descending. Now they were nearer. He saw their faces and perhaps heard their voices and it made that road very bright. Earth was like heaven for a little.

Angels have met each one of us, too—*real* angels though we did not see them or suspect their presence. Angels have access to our minds. They come to tell us glad tidings. And our holy thoughts and vows and resolutions; the cheery moments when things go well with us; that happiness that possesses us at times and that comes we know not how—these are God's hosts.

The second meeting was with his brother. It was twenty-one years since they had met and now he is afraid. Had Jacob not sinned against Esau he had had no need to fear him. There are many in our town

to-day whom you could set trembling by saying, "What of your brother?" The person who makes such a relationship a name of horror shuts one of the windows by which God reveals Himself, obliterates one of God's names, shuts out one view of heaven.

Now, just as we have all met God's hosts, so alas! there are rumours of an enemy on the way to meet us. How many fears each day of the future will bring! We would be well off if we were only to have four hundred! And we have to confess the things that terrify us most are the result of our own sin. Those of you who are young are now laying the foundation of the years that are to be. Your future is bound up in your present. Twenty years may pass but the old foundation remains. There are, it may be, years between you and your troubles—it may be weeks, it may be days, it may be minutes. Make a right use of them. Many men in a position like Jacob's would have made sure of one night's forgetfulness. But these hours were all-important—hours when Jacob felt he had no claim on God, no strength of his own. Yes, one night's wrestling with Him will undo the sins of all the years that are gone by, and the man who is a Prince with God need fear no foe, though he come 400 or 4,000 strong. I have to meet Esau to-morrow: I will meet with Christ to-night.

THE BROODING SPIRIT

GENESIS I. 2. PSALM CIV. 30.

"And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

GOD here introduces Himself and His Son and the Blessed Spirit to us. It is pleasant when we visit a house to find that we are welcomed by all—the father, the mother, and the children. In this verse we are specially introduced to that Person of the Godhead with whom in one sense we are to have most to do—the Person with whom we are to have Communion, that is, dealings, comings and goings. It is that Spirit who formed us, body, soul and spirit; who made us grow; taught us to know and learn and remember; that Spirit who has to do with our salvation, takes part in the work of effectual calling, justification, adoption and sanctification; warns us, helps us, teaches us to pray and to work and to teach others. He strives, entreats and invites. Therefore God presents Him to us in this most engaging attitude of work. The word in the Hebrew is "brooded upon." It is the same word as is used in Deut. xxxii. 11, describing the eagle "fluttering" over her young. The same verb is used by Jeremiah of his bones "quivering" or "giving way" under strong feeling. These are the only times that word is used. But the translators of the Bible were afraid to translate it

that way, out of reverence for the infinite nature of God. I do think it is a pity that men should be more concerned for the dignity of God than He Himself is. When we read that He "moved" on the face of the waters, I do not suppose many human hearts are touched by that. Though it was done in reverence, one feels vexed that the first time the Spirit is mentioned He should not be fully honoured. It is one of those things God warns men against so solemnly —the taking away from the words that are written. It is putting a veil upon His face. For the word means something very different. There is a tremendous idea of power in it; and more than power—there is love. It is the homeliest of all metaphors—the love of a mother-bird sitting on her eggs. There is no devotion greater. You see her quivering with excitement, with a fierce determination in her look, afraid of nothing but of leaving them; not only daring, but trustful; so possessed with her love and joy and hope that she thinks all others must be like herself.

What a task the Holy Spirit had now to face! This word means trembling with excitement, with joy, with eagerness, with love. The love of the Spirit is seen through all history from the very beginning. He represents Christ and Christ reveals the Father, and for thousands of years the Spirit has striven to tell men all He could of that Father's love.

AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

MARK II. 3. PSALM CXLV. 17-19.

"Borne of four."

Go where our Saviour liked, people followed. They gathered at the door, gave Him no leisure so much as to eat. They came to ask questions, to bring the diseased and those possessed with devils. They climbed trees, they even broke open the roof of a house—a stranger's house—and let down a poor, helpless man at His feet.

Why was this man so eager to come to Christ? It is evident from what our Lord said that he felt he was a sinner, and Christ saw his desire. The world may only know of our outward position, and certain things we strive after in this world, but He knows at this moment the utter desire of each heart here, and to every seeking one He says "Come."

"One which was borne of four." And these four men were not put to shame. Now, this applies specially to us. There are very few people in the world who have not got some one for whom they are bound to pray. It is not intended that any of us should have no such care, and I would say very seriously to each of you—the measure of your anxiety for others is the measure of your resemblance to Christ. Although you strive to serve God yourself,

if you go about your ordinary business and never feel burdened by the sin and the agony of others, I tell you this, you are very unlike the Christ who died. If, when you see or hear of any sinning, unhappy man or woman, you feel rather interested and enjoy having a look or a laugh at them, you have more to learn than you know. You *must* enter into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. And I tell you further—God will send you some day a trial that will force you to hide from the world and refuse to enter into its pleasures, and amid the world's laughter and the world's carelessness you will have to bring your helpless, erring friend or brother to the Master's feet. I charge you all solemnly to pray without ceasing, for any such known to you. I feel certain of this, that as after earnest prayers some joy is wont to happen to us, so the greatest sorrows of our life are sure to come on us from the direction in which we never sent our prayers.

But you say, "I *have* prayed and no good comes of it." Yes, that is one of the hardest difficulties I know. All I can say is—pray again; take the Kingdom of Heaven by violence; interrupt God, as it were; thrust your case before Him; tell Him what you want is this one healed, and give Him no rest; do not let Him go; and I tell you, you will not be put to shame.

THE LONGED-FOR DAYSMAN

JOB IX. 33. PSALM CX. 4.

"There is no daysman betwixt us."

THERE is something pathetic in poor Job's words here. He made the biggest mistake man ever made. Is not the whole of our religion, the whole story of God's relation to man, just the revelation of the Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ? From beginning to end of the Bible we see this coming glory. It brightens the first page of Genesis. From the very beginning the darkness of the world was brightened by this Morning Star. And it was round the Mediator's Presence that the glory of Eternity was manifested. He was the Father's "image," "daily His delight." "The glory I had with Thee before the world was." He was the light of men, the light of Heaven, the light of His Father's countenance. Yet Job was nearer the truth than any other. He had, as it were, put his finger on the difficulty. It was a tremendous step—a glorious day—when Abraham said—"God will provide a lamb." Job got further than that, and said the Lamb we need is one that must be both God and man—"that He might lay His hand upon *us both*."

It is easy for us to see it now, but it was the hardest of all truths. Men grasped the infinite power and wisdom of God, they could see many of His attributes,

astonishing though they were, but they were incapable of thinking out the plan of salvation. It had to be revealed. No created intelligence could think it out. Man has thought out wonderful inventions; God made man's mind capable of that; but there was a thought no man ever grasped. God hinted at it, foretold it in so many words, yet man could not see it, even to the very last. Christ's own mother, although she knew He was the Son of God, although she saw His sinlessness, failed to grasp it. The apostles never could grip it, and were never further from it than on the day God proclaimed Christ to be His Son with power by the resurrection from the dead. How could He be equal with God and equal with us? This was the highest result of Divine wisdom.

See the certainty of the riches of God's grace in saving one who denied and yet wished that there was such a thing as an advocate with the Father. When the fulness of the time came there were those who were waiting for the redemption of Israel, departing not from the Temple day nor night. There will always be work for the Spirit to do, by comforting, helping, convincing, converting, but also by revealing and enlightening. "He will take of Mine and show it unto you." When a time of prayer comes, then comes a time of grace. The first way the Spirit reveals things to us is by making us pray for them. He is a Spirit of grace and supplication.

GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY

MARK I. 14. PSALM LXXVII. 5-10.

"Now after that John was put into prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel."

THIS is a strange and yet wonderful verse. It sums up the whole of God's dealings, both with His friends and His enemies in the world. We have first His people's sufferings and God's silence, and second His enemies' sins and His striving with them.

The coming of John had been prophesied for seven hundred and forty years. None greater had been born of woman, for he was the Forerunner of the Son of God. The way this Gospel begins makes us expect for him a long and honourable career. We are told the very Son of God came and was baptized of him; then we read, "He was put in prison." Could we imagine a more unhappy end to a life that was beginning so grandly? Thirty years he had waited, six months he had toiled faithfully, and then—the prison-house! We should have expected God to send an angel to set the captive free, or, at least, that the fact would be distinctly stated as one of very sad importance, but there is nothing of the kind. We are simply told this: "Jesus came into Galilee preaching"; that is, He went about His work.

So will our experience be. Trials will befall us, and strange to say, God will not give us any explanation

why He sent them. The world goes on and our grief is unnoticed. There may be more sorrow in store, but God cannot tell us His plans now. We should not understand them. His explanations are reserved for Eternity, but He gives us now such comfort as He thinks right—enough to make us love and trust Him. If we had perfect sight we could have no faith. John was doing a great work, but there were things he could not do. When he was in prison he heard of them. So with us. We are laid aside. Why? Just that God may work. But we are never laid aside until our work is done. God knows when it is time for us to stop.

How does God deal with His enemies? Does He consume them in His wrath? No. Jesus came preaching the Gospel. Could there be a fitter illustration of the nobleman who said, "They will reverence my son"? Behold the love of God and the love of Christ! His Forerunner had been put in prison, and our Saviour knew that for Him, too, there were prepared the instruments of death, that He was going forth as a lamb to the slaughter. Yet He "came into Galilee," the country of the king who had imprisoned John, and there He preached the "Gospel of the Kingdom." Is not God dealing so with us? Death may be very near some of us. We are like those unbelieving Jews. We have heard God's messengers, we have read His Word, but we are still far off from Him. Yet His message to us to-day is still the same—"Repent and believe."

CONSECRATED WORKMANSHIP

EXODUS XXXI. 2-3. PSALM CXLIV. 1.

" I have called by name Bezaleel, . . . and I have filled him with the Spirit of God."

THIS was one of the best and greatest workmen mentioned in the Bible—one that had no need to be ashamed. No nobler description than this could be given of a man—he was filled with the Spirit of God. That is one of Christ's own titles—The Anointed.

Bezaleel *loved work*. That is one of God's own characteristics. We think the great idea of creation is the ease with which God worked. He simply had to say " Let there be," and there was. Some of us, perhaps, think that all God's purposes and plans were conceived in one moment. We do not know fully how God worked. But Christ said, " My Father worketh hitherto." Before eternal ages and all through them God put forth every power and faculty of His being, not lost in self-contemplation and now and again bestowing a thought on His creatures. The meaning of power is power to be used. " We are apt to forget," says a great student of human nature, " that the vast majority of men are naturally lazy and want to do as little as possible." If a man is idle it is not God's will. If we can be happy doing nothing, it is time we should pray about it.

Bezaleel *loved to do good work.* He recognised he was a fellow-worker with God. The material was all God's workmanship, on which He had spent a long time. The aim of Bezaleel's work was to manifest the character of God. God wished to let men know the whole purpose of His love, to give them some idea of Heaven, its inhabitants and its occupations. Therefore everything about the Tabernacle was to be of surpassing beauty as well as to be good, honest work. Bezaleel was called on to represent God to the world. That is the honour given to all workmen—a calling that demands all a man's powers, work that will add to the joy and comfort of people, work that will glorify God; not work simply that will pass examination or bring big wages, but work that will make earth a little like Heaven.

Bezaleel *loved to teach others to work.* That is the high honour put on all journeymen. Freely ye have received--if not, all the same—freely give. Take a pride in sharing your knowledge. "This winter I gave away most of my ideas," says Emerson. That is the mark of the Spirit's presence. He is *poured* out abundantly, and if we share our knowledge with others He will give us more.

This other honour Bezaleel had—from one of his brothers has descended the Lord Jesus Christ.

SEEKING THE LOST

LUKE XV. 8. PSALM CXIX. 176.

"If she lose one piece."

CHRIST must have seen His mother—or perhaps some neighbour—searching for the lost piece of money, and the picture impressed itself on His mind. It shows how a woman sweeping her house has eyes on her. There are not many actions in which a woman acts more characteristically.

The coin was lost. It bore the marks of its age, its country, the man who had fashioned it, perhaps of some who had used it, and now it had become part of this woman's possessions. To her it may have represented hard work and hard saving. So with every lost soul. Every one of us represents the history of thousands of years. What sorrow and what shame! Ay, and how much might be made of us! Our view of money is our view of God, and our view of ourselves. Watch what a man does with a halfpenny and you can get his character.

We lose things sometimes through no fault of ours, but most often from carelessness. We sow a seed and reap the fruits and a big bit of our life is lost. One of the things we shall find out in heaven will be the time we lost, the sorrows we caused others, the crowns we should have won. How much we lost God had to find!

The woman lights her candle, and that is what we must do when we begin to look for the lost. We must take the Word of God, the lights of natural affection, our own experience; and if there is any time we need light it is when we go to look for a soul—light to tell us its value, its need, its lurking-place. A great part of Christ's work consisted in training the Twelve for this.

She begins to sweep the house, and already begins to find. She discovers her own carelessness, learns the joy of orderliness, the shame of idleness. She finds things she was not looking for. I do not suppose anyone ever had a real turnover without finding something lost before. Many a man has found his own soul in looking for his son's.

She sweeps on, saying, "It can't be lost: it's within these walls." So in seeking to save a sinner there is hope, for he is here, on this side Eternity. Bad as he is, far astray as he is, he is within reach.

And at last she finds it! And she must needs go and tell her neighbours. It is a law of nature. Joy is infectious. "Rejoice with me!" Angels are helping you all the time you are seeking to save a soul. The lost are as dear to them as to you.

BRING ANOTHER VESSEL

2 KINGS IV. 1. PSALM CXLVI. 5-9.

" The creditor is come to take unto him my two children to be bondmen."

I HOPE you all feel that it is a very hateful thing to be in debt. Rather go to bed supperless than rise in debt. The Bible says sharper things about debtors than any creditor ever did.

Evidently this man died in debt. A very awful thing to say of a man and a prophet—but God stands up for him. " Thy servant did fear the Lord." He was a man of known character and integrity, who possibly through fearing God incurred debt, or at least lost the power of discharging it. It must have been hard for him to die under a cloud, leaving a widow, two sons and a hard creditor. Doubtless he committed all to God, and well his God looked after him.

We are all debtors. Especially at the last day of our lives must we say, " Forgive us our debts."

These were dark days in Israel. This creditor was one of those who say business is business; he was entitled to what the law gave him. It was not his fault the woman was a widow. He would have his seven years' work out of her sons. A prophet's debts were represented by the same figures as any other man's. There was his bond! Ay, and it was paid

to the last penny before the day closed, but against his own name was placed an entry in God's book which stands there still.

The distressed woman sought the best advice. " What have you got ? " " Only a little oil. Everything else sold. The creditor waiting outside." Now her faith is sorely tried. She is to go and borrow—incur more debt—and what she was told to do seemed ridiculous, but she obeyed. She and her two sons closed the door, and I dare say she prayed, and there would be a strange moment of expectancy as she looked round at nothing but emptiness, but as she poured out her little store of oil it flowed and yet did not diminish. Vessel after vessel was filled, until fear ceased and laughter rose to her lips. Every vessel was full ! How different that woman's step would be from what it was an hour ago, as she ran in love and gratitude to tell the prophet the wonderful thing that had happened. And the creditor was out of it ! The neighbours would come to see and hear the tale, and would say " God lives ! "

O, you women, tell of His mighty deeds. Let every vessel in your house be named " Holiness to the Lord." You never exhaust any of God's wells. He says, " Bring another vessel." You have got pardon, would you not wish assurance ? Grace ? Knowledge ? Love ? In your home ? your business ? your pleasure ? Is there not a vessel more ?

THE SLEEPLESS GUARD

PSALM CXXI. 8. PSALM XCI. 10-12.

"The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore."

This is often called the Traveller's Psalm. Livingstone read it and the 135th after breakfast the day he set out to walk with his father to Glasgow, to join the vessel which was to take him to Africa in 1840. A friend read it to Hedley Vicars at Waterloo Station when he set out for the Crimea to die. It is a Psalm for the night as well as the day. In one of the London Hospitals the words "He that keeps Israel neither slumbereth nor sleepeth" are printed in the wards.

The Jews were mountaineers and they loved to lift up their eyes to the hills. You have heard of the Scotchwoman in Canada who said, "O doctor, I think I'd get better if I could only see a hill." We see the hills every day and think nothing of them. Sir G. Airy, the great astronomer, never saw a cloud on a hill till he was past twenty, and he thought it was so wonderful he records it in his diary.

"Thy foot He'll not let slide, nor will
He slumber that thee keeps;
Behold, He that keeps Israel,
He slumbers not nor sleeps."

God does indeed keep our feet. A few inches on this side or that and we might a hundred times have met with death. We do not know what a journey may mean to any one of us. Well for us that at the common-place moments of life, when we are not thinking about God, He is thinking about us.

This was the last Psalm sung by us last Sabbath. How did God keep that promise to one of our number who joined with us in singing it, and in twenty minutes His hand touched her and she never again spoke? There is great love shown to us by God we never dream of. What a wonderful road she had to go! What love and honour surround the death of a saint! Think of the triumph and entrance of a soul into Glory—the coming forth to meet and welcome those who come afterwards day by day till the resurrection morning; then the going forth of the mind—the joyful imaginations and anticipations of the time when body and soul shall be united, the coming forth on the Judgment Day acknowledged before the world. How much a saint learns even here in the short days of time! How much more will not a perfected saint learn in glory! Faraday was once asked sneeringly if there would be newspapers and clubs in heaven. He looked, and said solemnly, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

LOVE OUTWITTING MIGHT

EXODUS II. 1-10. PSALM CV. 26.

"She called his name Moses."

WE know more about Rameses II than any other ancient king. Towards the end of the nineteenth century his embalmed body was found in Egypt. His father's was also found, and so wonderfully preserved were they that the resemblance to each other could be traced. This Rameses was the Pharaoh who commanded that the infant sons of the Israelites should be cast into the river Nile. He was a man of great personal bravery and his mighty deeds are recorded repeatedly on the walls of his great buildings. It is inferred from marks on the skull that he had been killed by the blow of an axe on the battlefield. The greatest king in the world at that time, how completely he was baffled by the providence of the King of Kings !

There is no greater figure in the world's history than Moses, the man who saw God's face, who received the Law, the leader of Israel, one of the most glorious types of Christ, and one of His greatest witnesses. Why, the world's history all revolved round Moses. He pointed to Christ.

This great Pharaoh was baffled, first, by a mother's love. Jochebed bore a great name—" Jehovah is

glorious." How great a thing a woman's love is! That she should forget her child is the limit of what is conceivable. Jochebed loved her child because she loved her God.

Secondly, by a little girl's wit. Miriam, obeying her mother and watching her little brother, said the cleverest thing anyone could have said: "Shall I go and call thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?" She kept her eyes open and was in communion with the Most High God. I do not suppose it ever entered her mind or her mother's that the babe should be brought to a palace—that in that little ark, daubed with pitch, watered with tears, lined with kisses and prayers, there was as great a treasure as in the monster one made by Noah.

Thirdly, by a baby's tears. With what eloquence they spoke! God chose the weak things, and the weak things at their weakest—to confound the mighty.

Pharaoh was baffled, further, by his own daughter's curiosity. God directed her steps that day down to the flags, directed her eyes, her ears, her mind, and touched her heart, making her the means not only of saving the child's life, but of providing for Moses' upbringing and his future training in all the learning of the Egyptians.

"To wit what would be done to him!" Might not people have said of him then as they said of him later, "We wot not what is become of him"? But *we* know, and within a little time you and I by God's grace will see him and join him in his song.

CHASTENING AND ITS AFTERMATH

HEBREWS XII. 11. PSALM CXIX. 71.

" Nevertheless afterward."

THESE two words are words of faith and hope. The one word recognises the pain, and the other holds out the hope. The chastening is grievous any way we look at it. It is grievous to think we have deserved chastening. It seems but yesterday since we were boys and girls, the whole world before us. All the joys God gives His people might have been ours. We laid up sin in our hearts, and God warned us times without number, but was very slow to punish us. No harm came. We just drifted hourly away from the right track, and to-day life is full of bitterness and there is a rough road seemingly before us as far as we can look.

It is grievous because we often do not see what we have done to deserve affliction. Sometimes God's own people are vexed. They have passed through trial. They acknowledged their sin. They tried to walk uprightly. They seem to have overcome the enemy, and then comes the old trial back again.

It is grievous because it is so hard. Many people make much of very little. They are annoyed if they lose a holiday. Others are tried by bodily pain, poverty, loss of health. They are tried in their

families : not by death, although that is hard enough, but by sin—sin that brings disgrace. They daren't speak of it. Their friends would be like Job's, they would add bitterness to their sorrow. And when deliverance comes, it is often too late—joy in life may be possible, but only when life is at its end.

But that word " afterward " is a word of hope. It is not meant to mock us. It is not a put-off. The fulness of joy is reserved for the better land. That " afterward " may be nearer than we imagine. There may be but one step between us and it. But, however far away, it has no end. It is worth waiting for.

Such trials drive us to God. If all went well with us we would have no sense of need. There would be no need of a friend that sticketh closer than a brother if a brother himself stuck close to us ; no need of a house of God eternal if our home here is so happy.

Has not affliction opened our eyes to our own sin ? We were selfish ; as unlike Christ as could be. We prayed carelessly—sometimes not at all. God's Word to us was wearisome. Now we search it as for hid treasure, and when we pray we have desires we really want granted. To be driven to one's knees by trouble is surely worth that trouble.

" Afterward " may begin *now*—the moment we wish it to. The very hour we are driven out of the fortress of our pride, forced to lean on Him, to cast all our burden on Him, then trial works " peaceable fruits."

THE SEAMLESS ROBE

JOHN XIX. 24. PSALM XXII. 15-20.

" Upon My vesture they did cast lots."

THESE words show us how very poor our Lord was. The apprehension of coming poverty oppresses many of God's people, yet it is the experience of most of us, if not all, that when the godly poor have died there was always something left. So long as we have one morsel more than we need, our cup overflows. Christ was often hungry. His last meal was taken in a stranger's house. When hanging on the cross two things only were His—His price, that bought the potter's field ; and His raiment—His outer and inner dress. And this emptiness was all for us ! He had given up bread, life, Eternity. Now His raiment must be given to the four poor, ill-paid, ill-clad Roman soldiers.

The very fact that heathen soldiers divided His raiment reveals the friendlessness of His death. They are very poor who have not someone to be with them at the last hour. Moses ascends Mount Nebo alone to die, but in addition to the Divine Presence he sees the whole nation of Israel below, watching and weeping. Aaron must die, but his priestly robes are taken off him by loving hands to be worn hereafter by his own son. When Elijah was taken up he has already begun

to put on the white and glistening raiment, and as his mantle falls from him there is an Elisha waiting to receive it, and wear it, and use it in God's name. The King of Glory is stripped by rude and angry hands. We should have thought the hardest heart would have been touched by such a scene. An ordinary deathbed will make people thoughtful. If they can do nothing to alleviate pain, they will at least show the silence of sympathy and awe. Death by crucifixion was such a horror that no words can describe it, and this was a crucifixion the like of which none had ever seen: three men—the one in the midst called a king; the other two, thieves; the passers-by mocking and reviling; the wild soldiers jeering and laughing and casting their dice.

Our Saviour was poor, and there can be little doubt the robes He wore were given Him by loving hands. We are told certain women followed Him and ministered to Him. Doubtless one of them had made that inner garment that had no seam. Her name is passed over, like the names of so many women whose names are laid up—part of the wondrous secret to be revealed hereafter.

As you and I sing these Psalms and read God's Word, portions may apply to us which we never dream of. And when we read of any sin or any doom, let us say, "Lord, is it I?" and fly to the Strong One for help. The doom of the wicked and the exceeding great reward of the righteous are both written in the volume of the Book. Therefore let us watch and pray.

THE SECRET OF A HAPPY HOME

2 SAMUEL VI. 11. PSALM CXXXII. 1-5.

"And the Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his household."

OBED-EDOM awoke one day and found himself famous. The Ark had lain long at Kirjath-jearim and the first thing David did after he had been acknowledged king by all the people was to determine to honour God by bringing it up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was built on the summit of a rocky hill, and the road was steep and rough. No wonder the men stumbled and the Ark shook on the little wooden two-wheeled cart, so much so that Uzzah put forth his hand and took hold of the Ark, and God smote him for his error and he died. There was a distinct command that no one was to touch or even look upon the Ark save the priests. It was a sore judgment upon disobedience, but it was needed to prevent greater judgments. We may imagine the consternation. A man struck dead the day they had met to honour God! And David and his 30,000 men will do nothing further! So the Ark was carried aside into the house of Obed-edom. It required great faith to receive it after what had happened. Obed-edom received it and found himself famous. Like James and John, we think God can grant us to sit on His right hand and His left, and we forget these places must be waited for and worked for. Doubtless Obed-edom deserved his fame and had been preparing for it.

Obed-edom's family were promoted, and long years after they held an honourable post. If you were to visit Palestine now you would easily find Kirjath-jearim. It lies more than fifteen miles from Jerusalem. A little beyond it there is a valley, on whose far side there is a piece of ground surrounded by trees, and if you ask the Arabs the name of it they tell you it is *Kuryet es Saideh*—" the place where the blessed man dwelt." Those who have visited it tell us that it is one of the greenest spots in Palestine. " The righteous man's memorial shall everlasting prove."

If any of you would like to share in Obed-edom's blessing, here is one way—by having family religion, and the most characteristic act of family religion is family worship. Let it be short—how short, it is not for me to say. Some of the best people I have known never protracted it beyond five minutes. It cannot be too short, especially if there are children. When Sir Walter Scott was laying out a new bowling-green at Abbotsford, he said to a friend, " In truth, I wished to have a smooth walk and a canny seat for myself within earshot of Peter's evening psalm." Peter Matheson, his coachman, was a devout Presbyterian, " and many a time," says this friend, " have I in after years accompanied Scott on his evening stroll, when the principal object was to enjoy from the bowling-green the unfailing melody of the good man's family worship, as Peter's manly voice led the humble choir within."

SATAN TO BE BRUISED

ROMANS XVI. 20. PSALM LIX. 1-2.

"And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

THESE words carry us back thousands of years to that hour when the devil heard his doom from the mouth of God. It was the first promise to Eve and the last to the Romans. The early Christians had a hard struggle. They had all sinned after the lusts of the flesh. Their bodies had acquired a love for sin. Sin had become almost a necessity in their lives. They could not stir abroad without meeting temptation. They had to give up their old pleasures, their old way of livelihood. They were constantly in fear, not only of want but of death. They felt keenly they were fighting a battle—heathens, Jews, everyone was against them, but the devil was their worst enemy.

What more comforting message could Paul give? It refers, perhaps, first of all to death. Some of them in a few days or years were to be put to death. All of them must ere long put off this tabernacle of clay. The shortness of time is one of the greatest commonplaces in the world. We are like travellers who are late, and instead of pushing on we stop everyone we meet and tell them we are behind. The great majority of us are past middle life; some of us very near the

end of our journey. What a glorious promise! Satan is to be bruised. There are few moments happier than those in which we get a victory over sin. But what will the joy of heaven be, when one is redeemed, face to face with God Himself, rejoicing in His love, untrammelled by sin, delighting in His service?

But the promise refers not only to the other world, but also to this. It refers to our triumph over besetting sin. We fight long and wearily. It is good for us not to be tempted, but far better for us to be tempted and to overcome. None of us has the right to go and look for it. No one dare say, I shall put myself in the way of it and see how I stand it. Far better never face it at all. God wants us to overcome, and if in His Providence He sends temptation in our way, let us face it and overcome it. Let us never enter a fight without God's bidding. When Satan gets us to think of certain subjects, we are done for. Half the battle is over when he gets us to come down into the plain and fight. Keep out of his way. There is no cowardice in that. Decline combat with him and he is bruised.

DAVID'S OATH TO JONATHAN

1 SAMUEL XX. 16. PSALM XVIII. 49-50.

" So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David."

DAVID said there was but a step between him and death, but he was quite wrong! Many a glorious step, and alas! many a sinful step, had to be taken before it was time for him to die. And God had many a step to take; all the eternal purposes had to be carried out; Christ was to be born of David, and until God's plans were fulfilled death could not come nigh him.

Jonathan's affection for his father is as wonderful as his love for David. Jephthah's daughter loved and obeyed her father, though he made a terrible mistake in devoting her to death. She is one of the noblest types of womanhood because of that. Any boy can honour a good, kind and clever father, but herein is love—to love and honour, even while it is necessary to disobey, a bad father. Few people are more honoured even in this world than those who spread the mantle of charity over a parent's faults.

Jonathan's secret source of power is shown in verse 12. He speaks to David and prays to God at the same time. He feels that God is near. He made David " swear again, because he loved him." That is why a teetotaler takes an oath—not only to bind

himself, but because God loves to hear him. That is why Christ asked Peter three times if he loved Him. He was so pleased to hear Peter say it.

Jonathan's plan with the arrows shows us he was not a genius, but a simple, honest, brave man, who had become famous, not because he had gifts of intellect that few men have, but because he had great faith in God and used the talents he had. Perhaps there were those who said, "It's a fine thing to be a king's son, with nothing to do but to amuse himself, with a lad to fetch and carry for him." And all the time Jonathan had been affronted and his father had tried to kill him. Yet people say that regularly. They envy the rich; they say they have lots of money and nothing to do. But that is a sinful and foolish way to speak; it is charging God foolishly, it is accusing God of unfairness, it shows ignorance of God's whole way of dealing with men. No man can enter heaven without tribulation, every man has to bear some burden and has to learn the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. Our own trials have never been heavier than when the world said we had not any. The rich very specially have their own trials.

"Go in peace, forasmuch as we have made a covenant." That is what we and God should say to one another as we go away from His sanctuary to-day. "All's well; I've made a covenant; I've got His promise; I've put myself in His keeping."

WOMEN AGED AND HOLY

TITUS II. 3. PSALM CI. 1–2.

"The aged women likewise."

A PATHETIC word! We can see in our own streets now what an old woman in heathen times might be—all beauty gone, all mirth, all self-respect. But through Christianity two things are not gone. Pity is not gone. Hope is not gone. We know how terribly lonely they are in the East, familiar with blows and taunts, regrets and tears. Surely our Lord must have great compassion for old women, although fallen very low. They are all God's creatures and no doubt the devil taunts Him with them. But Christianity shows us how noble all aged women can be. We are familiar enough with beauty in the young, but where Christianity is we see the same face with a deeper and more spiritual beauty, with the look of love and sympathy and fellowship with God that has grown with years.

"Not slanderers" (R.V.). The word is "diabolous," not simply women who tell lies and mean to tell them, but women who bring them up out of the past. One is often vexed to find a thing that had been forgotten and perhaps forgiven by God, brought back to light.

"Enslaved to much wine" (R.V.). That denotes the power wine has. A woman so enslaved may say, "I can stop when I like, take it or not take it,

keep it in its proper place." But in the end it gains the mastery, destroys temper, affects hands, tongue, judgment; and although suffering all that, that woman says, " I will seek it again."

" Teachers of that which is good " (R.V.). There are women who teach others to be selfish, who put others up to mischief, whose whole influence is downwards, who encourage untidiness, insolence, loud speaking and loud laughter; and there are women with a high standard, teachers, although they do not know it, and would not take that title, who by their dress, their home life and the meekness and gentleness of their conduct are unconsciously teachers of good.

" That they may teach the young women to love their husbands." Love is a thing that can die. It must be kept in exercise. A young woman adorns herself for her lover and she does well, but there is no sadder sight than to see her after a time giving up her dainty ways and becoming a sloven. Especially, to love a bad husband is a task worthy of any woman who has a heart. The woman who knows what a good husband is can see what a bad one is, and she will set herself to help in that house, not shutting her own door against it, but willing to encourage, to pray for, to advise, to sympathise with the poor creature whose husband does wrong.

" Workers at home " (R.V.). A woman should not be idle; she should be a worker " *at home,*" as well as on the streets or at a meeting. And a wise woman will know there is a time for laying down her seam, as well as a time for taking it up.

WALKING WITH GOD

GENESIS V. 24. PSALM CXXXIX. 18.

"Enoch walked with God."

OUR first parents had been holy and happy. Their great happiness lay in this, that they had fellowship with God. They talked with Him and He with them. Then a sad verse tells us they heard Him walking in the garden in the cool of the evening and they hid themselves from His presence. They were ashamed and afraid. One feels as if the old friendship had gone for ever. God hid His face. It is true we read later, "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord," but it was as on one far away, who had left only His Name. Our text brings back good news. "Enoch walked with God." Think of the beauty of that expression. It is beautiful, as restoring us to a state better even than that of Paradise; beautiful, as showing the friendship therein. It would be great love for God to allow a man to call upon His Name and to have access now and again, but to walk with Him—to have Him always in our company, happy, as with a friend—that is wondrous love. I would like you to try to realise that for yourselves—to have God always with you—to go where He goes and to have Him going where you go. We are far too apt to feel at a distance from Him.

It has been told by Dr. Arnold, of Rugby, that it pained and vexed him to find, when he came one day from seeing one of his scholars who was dying, that there was a complete break, as it were, as he joined the boys at their Latin class, and thereafter he always began that lesson with a prayer. He wished to feel the holiness, the religiousness, of every act of life. Many people feel that they need to compose themselves; they cannot pass quickly into God's presence. They cannot proceed from some game instantly to the worship of God. Now, I do not say we are to rush thoughtlessly into His presence, but we ought to take Him into our pleasures—to walk with Him—to feel we are always together, that *all* life is religious.

Jude tells us Enoch's was an active life. We are apt to think of him as a quiet, serious man, who did not meddle with other men's affairs, whose thoughts were all of another world. That is the idea that leads men to go and live in "Retreats," away from the bustle of the world. To walk with God or to walk with Christ is to go about doing good.

"For God took him." We are not told how or when it happened, but doubtless God did it openly and triumphantly. Enoch had the testimony that he pleased God. "God took him," and pointed men upwards and above. It was as if God were wearying to have a man in heaven to tell him all the secret of His love. To be the first to enter heaven body and soul was a great honour.

OUR FRIENDS IN HEAVEN

MARK V. 35. PSALM LXXIII. 23-26.

"Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further."

"TROUBLE" is not a word ever to be used to our Lord. The word is not big enough, not grand enough. It is a word to describe the little we ask of any one. "May I trouble you?" we say when we ask a small service, but if we gave a man work that would take up years of his life—if a man were asked to recover lost guns or lead a forlorn hope, we should not say "May I trouble you?" We say "In God's name," or we say nothing at all.

When a daughter dies, have we no further right to speak of her to Christ? Are we to say to Him, "There is no need to trouble Thee further"? Does death snap our and her relationship to Him? Are we to cease to pray?

We should come to Christ and tell Him that we are satisfied—that we say "Thy will be done." The death of a young person means that our will has not been done. It means the loss of companionship, the disappointing of high hopes, the denial of many an earnest prayer, but it is God's doing.

We should come to Christ to thank Him. How is it possible to say all that a godly child is in a household? What an opening up of the hearts of the

father and mother in love ! What delight in witnessing the beginning of affection, the dawning of intelligence, the use of faculties and their development ; above all, the growth of character ! The infinite delight of watching the beginnings of grace, the unspeakable happiness of seeing a child sitting down humbly and lovingly at the Lord's Table, the joy of being the parents of one who is in Christ for ever and ever ! For all that joy, for the loan of such a gift, should we not thank Christ ? There is so much to bless Him for already. If the life in heaven lasted but one hour, that hour would be worth all the years of suffering on earth.

We should come to Him to ask forgiveness. We remember having vexed those who have been taken from us. We have also vexed Christ. Our friends in heaven have forgiven us long ago. They are wearying to ask us to forgive them. They know more about us now as well as about themselves.

Would it be wrong to say to Christ, " Tell her I am thinking of her—that I am sorry for misunderstanding her ; tell her, if it is Thy will, that her death will bring me nearer to Thee ? " Surely it would not.

Heaven should be a very real place to us. Are there not open secrets in the Bible still, to be discovered by those who have fellowship with the Lamb, who follow Him wherever He goes, who read when He opens the seals ?

ACHAN'S MEMORIAL

JOSHUA VII. 26. PSALM XC. 8.

"And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day."

THERE were three heaps of stones near the beginning of the great highway that led from the Jordan past Jericho into the promised land. Each heap was meant for a memorial, so that the eye was at once attracted and people asked, "What is the meaning thereof?" The first was at Gilgal, and was to show the mighty power of God—the great things He had done. He dried up the river Jordan just as He had dried up the Red Sea forty years before. The second heap was the ruins of Jericho, and when men asked why this city was left in heaps, they were told it was to show that God still kept watch and ward over His people, standing as a sentinel at the gates of their country. He was their strong city and their rock of defence. The third heap was the heap of Achan. What is the meaning of it?

That heap would tell them the need of instant obedience. Sin is sweet to the taste for a moment. It lies ever near us. The dallying with it is the first wrong step. The will of God is not enough, there must be a reason. Once you are blind enough to doubt God's love, you have given the strongest possible

blow to reason. If your mind cannot trust God, your mind is not to be trusted.

That heap would show the far-reaching effect of sin. Israel was defeated, and the God of Israel was dishonoured before all other nations. That lesson is written very clearly in Old Testament history. One man may bring a blessing to a nation. Another may bring a curse. If we sin, we go from God. Sin is a more fearful thing than we know—more corrupting, more debasing. We shall be surprised hereafter to find what sin cost us. How it lowered Israel! The spell of their invincibility was gone. The little village of Ai had routed them. Each one of us carries the honour of his church, his country, and his family, in his hands. Our town will get the credit of our sin over Scotland, and Scotland will get the credit of it all over the world.

And how was Achan's sin found out? By the direct pointing of the finger of God. That direct determination happened more than once in ancient times. We have God to deal with. God can in many ways point out the evil-doer; and long before the world sees him, the man himself feels he is pointed out.

But God is ever ready to forgive. And there was the offer of forgiveness given to Achan, "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to God, and make confession unto Him." And Achan said, "I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel."

HONOURING GOOD MINISTERS

1 THESS. V. 12. PSALM CXXXII. 15–16.

" We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you ; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."

WE have here a startling thing : the Apostle writes : " We entreat you—we beseech you—to know them that are over you." It is a common saying, The less you know of ministers the better. There are two extremes : people who refuse to see any fault in their minister, no matter how glaring ; and people who are always looking out for faults. It is hard for a minister, of course, to speak, being in the same condemnation. But I agree with those that say one ought to look for much in a minister. He is always near the altar. A fault that is bad enough in another man is a hundred fold worse in a minister. Pride, greed, meanness, dishonesty, look very black in him. There is nothing that any of you will say against an ungodly minister with which I shall not agree. I have known bad ones—men whom I try never to think of. But I say this also—I am happy to know many godly men who are not ministers, old men and young men, to whom I could go in any kind of trouble ; but if to-morrow I needed comfort, or advice, or money help to the last penny a man had, it would be to a minister I would go.

Remember they are sinful men like yourselves, not men who know they are sure of heaven, but men who have a sore struggle with temptation, who know neither the extent of their failures nor their successes, but as a rule hear only about failures. A man without trials could not be a minister. Angels were as little believed as ordinary mortals.

They ought to be esteemed. The man who has got a situation for you, you cannot help liking; the doctor who has cured you; the teacher who has taught you; the parents who fed you; the comrades who made you happy. But if a man by word and example, in public or private, has striven to bring you nearer to God and to keep you from evil; if he has shown you how glorious your daily life may be, how near God is, what opportunities you have; if he has stirred you up to help others, to treat others as those who may be sons and daughters of the Almighty; if he has shown you your own vileness, the holiness of God, the tenderness of His Spirit, the loveliness of Christ; if he has rolled away darkness and brought sunshine; if he has opened up the Scriptures; if he made you see the all-encompassing hand of God—that's a work that might well make him esteemed. It will not always bring love. The Apostle himself says, "Even though the more I love you, the less I be loved."

GOOD AND BAD TALK

COL. IV. 6. PSALM CIX. 14.

"Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt."

THIS is a text which condemns us every one, and specially condemns a minister. That is why I have chosen it—that we all may be stirred up to make a better and a higher use of the marvellous faculty of speech which God has given us. You may put so much love and kindness into a sentence that it may become one's companion for a lifetime. Or you may speak a cruel word, and it will sting to the last, and may sting at any moment.

Words are so easily uttered. This tremendous power which we use every day, and which we may be called on at any moment to use to any person, may spoil a life, ruin a life, or help a life, or even save generations. Life and death are in the power of the tongue. It is a solemn thing when a child begins to speak. It is taking up its armour. It is like a knight preparing for the lists. What kind of shield will he have won when his warfare is accomplished ?

So, says Paul, having this tremendous weapon, let us always use it graciously ; not always about grace, but always with grace ; and that excludes all the wrong kind of talk we are all familiar with—filthy conversation, profane conversation, idle talk, vain

repetitions, unmannerly language, and rough, uncultivated speech.

"Seasoned with salt": that means carefully prepared beforehand by holy living and high thinking. "Take no thought beforehand" doubtless applies to all believers, but we need to have our minds in good exercise. We should be like a palace of the king, every part of our being so charged with grace—mind, eyes, mouth, hands, that although only a few moments may elapse before the conception of the thought and its utterance, it will have been charged with grace—seasoned. In a world full of emergencies we need to be habitually communing with God, sitting in the heavenly places with Christ; and then we can rise to any height.

It means not only that we draw upon God, but that the treasure is in earthen vessels. It has a flavour of the utterer. We say, "That's good; it's like him; it is seasoned with his salt and bears his mark."

And it must be seasoned with reference to the one to whom we speak. We must not give the same word to every one, but a kind word to the weary, a frank word to the earnest seeker, a rod for the fool's back. Such were Christ's words to Nicodemus, to Peter, to Judas, to Pilate, and such should ours be.

"Seasoned with salt" means that they will last for ever and be worth keeping; ready for keeping and meant to be kept, if not by men, by God.

Keep close to Christ. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, even the whole purpose and design of God, and men will say, "Sir, we had good talk."

BLESSINGS IN FRAGMENTS

JOHN VI. 13. PSALM XC. 11–12.

" The fragments which remained over and above."

ASTRONOMERS and mathematicians, men whom the Spirit of God has filled with wisdom, tell us that our earth flies eighteen miles every second through the realms of space ; that in going round the sun it has to travel 583 million miles ; and that to do so it takes 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, 46 seconds, and nine two hundredths, or .045, of a second—that is, properly speaking, the exact length of a year ; but as fractions are awkward to deal with, we take these fractions, or fragments that remain, over and above the 365 days, and put them aside until they mount up to a whole day. This is done, roughly speaking, every four years, and then we take tha day, made up of fragments, and add it to the fourth year, which we call Leap Year. These extra four and twenty hours we may look upon as twice twelve basketfuls of sixty minutes each, a minute meaning literally a fragment or a broken piece of time. The God who made these priceless fragments wishes us to gather them up and use them well.

One cannot help thinking that the poor woman who baked the five loaves—for barley was poor men's food—must have been not only a good baker, but one

who gave good measure, otherwise Christ would not have honoured her by entering into partnership with her; and what He added to the labour of her hands was not of inferior quality. They would indeed by His blessing become the finest barley loaves man ever ate. The disciples would find that out as they feasted on the fragments at their leisure for days afterwards. In the same way surely we may expect this 29th day of February to have a special heavenly quality about it, if only we will taste and see.

The little lad, too, who stood beside our Lord that day must have been no common boy. He might easily have sold his little stock to some of the hungry crowd. Apparently he preferred listening to the words of Christ. But he lent it to Christ, making no terms with Him! One cannot help wondering how Christ repaid him. The boy, of course, would get some of the fragments to carry home. But would Christ give him the few farthings that would be the current market price of the loaves and fishes? Or would He say to Philip, "Give the boy the two hundred pence that you calculated it would take to feed these 5,000 men?" Or had the disciples no such sum of money in their common purse, and had the little lad nothing for his hire but a share of the fragments, and a life-long memory of the joy and wonder of that evening meal, and the promise that God would pay His debt in His own way and in His own time? Perhaps the best part of that charming story has still to be told us.

AARON'S BUDDING ROD

NUMBERS XVII. 8. PSALM LXXXIX. 15.

"And, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded."

THERE never was perhaps a more solemn spectacle than that which was seen on the tenth day of the seventh month of every year in Israel. It was the great Day of Atonement. On that day none were permitted to enter the court of the Tabernacle. The people stood waiting in the outer court. There is something very touching in seeing a man going forth on an enterprise all alone—especially if it may end in death; but if our hopes, our life, depended on that life, our anxiety would be infinitely increased. On that great day the people watched Aaron. They saw the two goats—one of them led away into the wilderness. They saw Aaron go from the Holy into the Most Holy Place, and they saw him no more. They could hear the tinkling of the bells upon his robes, but that was all. And in that Holy of Holies there was the censer that told of God's love, the mercy seat and the cherubim, the tables of the Covenant that reminded him of sin, the pot of manna that provided earthly sustenance, and "the rod of Aaron"—his own right to enter in.

If God has to do some terrible deed, He follows it

with one of love. Judgment is His strange work. No man was ever more honourably and distinctly set forth for a special mission than Aaron was. And yet the people had rebelled against him. We should have said it was enough that the rebels were swallowed up, but now God will do a strange thing and give them another lesson.

" Behold, the rod of Aaron budded." God magnifies His grace. Some things Aaron might have been proud of—but there could be no pride about that rod. It blossomed not by his skill or device. It lay before God, laid up in the Ark. We should naturally have expected the rod to remain in Aaron's hand, or in his home, as an heirloom, a thing to be proud of, to show off. Not so. It was God's doing. We all should like our work to be seen. We should like to be the means of converting others and getting credit for it. Sometimes we only know of the good we have done to others when they have been taken away. But they don't cease to be. They flourish in God's house for ever and ever, and at times God gives us a glimpse of them. Once a year Aaron saw that rod. So when we come into the Holy of Holies, especially in some hour of prayer, when we are sore downcast by sin and don't know what to do, God shows us the blossoming rod. By faith Aaron could think of that rod laid up before God. So also with the saint. What can you show for your work? Why, someone now flourishing in God's house.

THE GLORIOUS SUCCESSION OF PREACHERS

MARK 1. 16. PSALM XXII. 27-31.

" Now as He walked by the sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers."

WHEN John the Baptist was put in prison our Saviour was left alone. He entered into John's work, preaching the same Gospel, using the very same words. At the beginning of His ministry, as at the end of it, He was indeed alone. There was no other preacher of righteousness in the wide world. We have our Saviour standing alone fighting the world's battle. We think of the desolation, the agony of His last hours, but may we not apply to the outset of His career those touching words, " I looked and there was none to help, and I wondered that there was none to uphold?" As our Saviour walked by the sea of Galilee the thought of His loneliness must have pierced His soul. He had come into the midst of His own people, and we know God always uses regular means and regular instrumentality when they are to be had. There were many scribes and wise men and chief priests at that time in Palestine, and if there had been one of them waiting for the salvation of God and willing to follow Him, he would have been called. But the nation was steeped in hypocrisy, and that is one of the most fatal

of sins. You may have hope of a thief, or a drunkard, or a murderer, but when a man becomes a hypocrite there is, humanly speaking, little hope of him.

Those whom our Saviour did call were ignorant, unlearned, if you will, but they were undoubtedly humble and simple and honest-hearted. They were hard-working men all their days. Our Saviour Himself toiled till His thirtieth year as a carpenter; and the most of His disciples, and the noblest among them, were called from the midst of their daily labours. It was when they were working now that He gave them the formal and final call to follow Him. And so all through the Scriptures we find God manifesting Himself to His people while they are engaged in their ordinary calling.

Also they were loving. It is very noteworthy that among Christ's disciples there were three pairs of brothers, and at least three pairs of companions—that shows us the advantage of a lovable character. There are many Christians in the world so ill-natured that they bring great discredit on God's cause, and the fact that James and John, Peter and Andrew, were all partners proves that they must have been of a kind, lovable nature. Unlovable, ill-natured men may be Christians, but they can't be, and never shall be, apostles. The early Christians were noted over all the world for their love, and to their loving one another they owed one half of their power.

HANNAH'S LOAN TO GOD

1 SAM. I. 28. PSALM CXVI. 12.

"As long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord."

The Spirit of God hides wondrous things in words. We all know how a common word can be transformed to us. We see something in it we never saw before. We notice it in reading the Scriptures, in holy associations, in friendship. Every one of us uses some words in a sense peculiarly our own. The glory of God often falls upon a word, like the sunlight on a hill side, with a gleam of brightness, or as it fell on Stephen. "And all that beheld him saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." We know the meaning of the word "lent"—a word with most unpleasant associations to us all—but this was an altogether new and strange loan. It was one Hannah had hardly possessed or enjoyed—a loan of what she could ill spare for it was all she had. When people borrow they don't strip us of all we possess—they don't impoverish us. But this was her only son. Like the widow in the New Testament, she cast in all her living.

Further it was a loan of what she really hadn't got, for she had promised her son before God gave him to her.

It was also a loan to be spent. When we lend anything we say—"Be careful of it. I would not like it

injured. It could not be replaced." But Hannah gave God a free hand although she knew prophets had not been too well treated in Israel.

And it was a loan for ever.

Then a new view comes in here. If it was a gift, it was also a debt. She owed God more than her son. She owed herself, and the loan was only part-payment of her own debt.

Sure enough it was entered in God's book as a loan. It is not forgotten and never will be. It has been a thousand times repaid long ago—repaid in Hannah's patience, in her husband's affection, and in her great "Song"--so great that the like of it is hardly to be found in literature; repaid in her son's fame and in his great service for God. No mother in all the Bible is so everlastingly and inevitably associated with her son as Hannah. Above all, God reveals to her, first of all people, the eternal name of His Son, "The Anointed."

Asking and receiving, getting and giving, lending and borrowing, as with happy husband and wife, they all come to mean the same thing. All dealings with God—every transaction you have with Him—makes you a partner with Him and that for ever. To KNOW God is eternal life.

CHRIST IN THE PSALMS

MARK XII. 10, 24. PSALM II. 7, 8.

"Have ye not read this Scripture?
"Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God?"

THE cause of all the mistakes you and I make, the cause of all our unbelief and mistrust, is either ignorance of our Bible or ignorance of God's power. Remember God is willing to help you. He has given us two books—the Bible and providence—and in these two we get all we need. In the hour of sore temptation, remember your Bible, and for that purpose know it as well as possible beforehand. You will never know or learn anything in this world but you will find a use for it.

Part of these Scriptures were the Psalms, and the Psalms tell us of Christ. The great objection people make to them is that they do not do so. They say His name never occurs in them, and so, many well-meaning persons have written hymns; and it is true His name appears in them, but little else. Might we not say to them, Have ye not read the Scripture? Of course the word "Christ" does not appear, but the word "Anointed" occurs, and that is just our English word for "Christ." Nor does the word "Jesus" occur, but "Saviour" does, and the word "Jesus" means "Saviour."

The Psalms are full of Christ. Is it not part of our faith that God and Christ are one, " the same in substance, equal in power and glory " ? If the Psalms are full of God, are they not full of Christ ? Where in the Bible will you find such loud and earnest cries for mercy and salvation ? People say the Psalms were for the Jews, but indeed I often think a Jewish priest must have found it far harder to get Psalms to suit his text than a Christian minister does.

One might ask, Was it likely God would leave His Church in ignorance of His greatest, His unspeakable gift when He calls on His Church to praise Him ? How can we praise God but through Jesus ? To say Christ is not in the Psalms would be the same as if a man were to ask you to admire the beauty of his house when you could not only not see the best parts of it, but when the very door was shut in your face.

If you want to know what Christ was doing before the world was, you must search the Psalms. It is the only part of the Bible that tells us God's words and Christ's words in eternity. If you want to know what Christ did and suffered while on earth, you get it most fully in the 22nd Psalm. He Himself quoted it on the cross. If you want to know His glory here and hereafter you will find it more fully in the Psalms than anywhere else in Scripture.

CHRIST APPREHENDING THE PERSECUTOR

ACTS IX. 1. PSALM XXXVII. 12.

"Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter."

IT is strange indeed to read of Paul abandoning fame and honour and promotion in one instant. He comes with a certain amount of state to lay hold on men and women, to bind them and drag them as captives away to prison and to death, and in a few days after, he is being persecuted himself as one of them. More interesting to us still as Christians is the story of the conversion of the man to whom Christianity owes more than to any other. The Evangelists tell us the story of Christ's life, showing us how it was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, but Paul explains to us the whole secret of the Almighty, and shows how in the very nature of things it was needful for Christ to become flesh and be made sin for us, and how we are made the righteousness of God in Him, and heirs with Him of all His fulness.

But, above all, to us as to Paul himself the story is interesting as the saving of the soul of the chief of sinners. Paul never seems to weary telling of it. Three times in the history we have the story told at full length.

Before his conversion, no character at first seems darker. A persecutor, he was exceedingly mad against Christians. At the death of Stephen he took as prominent a place as could be got, holding the raiment

of the witnesses. Yet this is by no means the worst kind of character in the world. "I would thou wert either cold or hot." If a man thinks keenly on a subject he may think wrongly, but he may come, in the grace of God, to think rightly. It is the self-satisfied, perfectly contented man, the man who takes no interest in things, the man who has heard of heaven and hell, of Christ and God, and is unmoved—that is the man we have to fear for.

Paul had been getting much light without knowing it. The early Christians' example had been influencing him unconsciously. He had seen Stephen's dying look and heard his prayer. No man had greater reason than Stephen to look otherwise when men were gnashing their teeth at him; and when he died there was no one about him of whom he would despair so much as the young man Saul. The holy look of Stephen had a deep effect on Paul.

No doubt the Christians were praying for him continually. They had heard of his coming to Damascus, were too well aware of his fiery energy, and doubtless they prayed that his counsel might be turned to nought. Perhaps some, hoping against hope, prayed that his eyes might be opened to see his sin. We do not pray as we ought to do for God's enemies. Have we ever wrestled for them in prayer as we would for our own flesh and blood?

We can't tell all the pricks Paul kicked against—his prayers, his vows, his memories.

Then Jesus Christ came to him, and in a moment he was converted.

GOD OF OUR FATHERS

EXODUS XV. 2. PSALM XXXIV. 8.

" My father's God."

ONE might say up till now this was the happiest moment in the life of Moses; and perhaps for the first time in all his life Moses sang. He saw it all now! God had kept His word. What a great advance from that morning eighty years ago, when he lay in the little ark among the reeds—and the babe wept. In the first moment of rejoicing his mind goes away back to the home of his childhood. He thinks of his father and mother, who gave him up in charge to the providence of God, and he sings of his " father's God." In early childhood his mother nursed him. His father would probably see very little of him. The people, of course, it is evident, had access to the royal family. We find Miriam watching from a little distance, and it pleases the imagination to think of his mother leading him about in company with attendants—a royal retinue—and Amram, a poor slave, stealing a few moments to watch his child—stealing them at the expense of harder work—more bricks to make and less time to make them, and afraid lest his feelings should overpower him, and his own and his wife's secret come to light. They were a brave pair. Amram evidently had been willing to make a great surrender for the sake of his

son. Father and mother had, as it were, to part for life, and people would be asking him continually where his wife had gone. Amram had died, and perhaps his last moments were clouded with fear. What if Moses had been spared only to become an idolater? Rescued from the Nile only to plunge into sin? Learning all the wisdom of the Egyptians and not knowing the true God? Called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and forgetting his sonship to God? But Amram died in faith. And now in this great hour of triumph, when for the first time Moses is exalted before the people, he does not forget the poor unknown slave who was his father. All pain is forgotten as he thinks how happy that father would have been to have seen that day.

There is a wonderful thought of joy in the words "My God." The whole of religion consists in that. That is the sum of God's purpose. "Ye are Mine." It is the result of the work of redemption that we poor sinners should say, "He is mine," claiming His love, His grace, His mercy, and His fellowship. But what an added joy when one can say "My father's God." It lifts up the earthly relation. Doubtless by night and day Amram had prayed for Moses that he might love God and work for God, and he had died, his prayers answered only in part. But a prayer never comes to an end, even though it be but for a small matter.

FORMS OF FALSE WITNESS

EXODUS XX. 16. PSALM XV. 1-3.

" Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour."

PEOPLE have often wondered there was no commandment against lying. The reason is simply because God wants us to feel that the principle underlying the commandments is the law of love.

Who is my neighbour ? We have a divine answer to that. My neighbour is the person to whom I can do a kindness. " Thou shalt love thy neighbour." Do not speak falsely, either to him or about him.

Bearing false witness means telling lies in a court of justice. We never leave our homes but we may see or hear something about which we may have to testify. A man's life may depend on our accuracy in repeating words. One step, one glance of ours, may stand between a man and death. We have seen that in great trials. We have the character and lives of others in our keeping and we should begin when we are little to cultivate the habit of accuracy, of keeping our eyes open, of being able to tell exactly what we see. Our accuracy may save a man's life.

Silence may be false witness. It is quite a common trick to say, " I never said a word against him." There is a time when one ought to speak, when silence is base and cowardly and cruel.

Speaking well of a man may be false witness. There

is such a thing as condemning a man with faint praise. That is the worst kind of false witness, for you are pretending to speak kindly and are speaking cruelly. It is double dishonesty—it is treachery.

Flattery is false witness. We love to be flattered; even when we know the person is laughing at us we think there must be some truth in what he says. Flattery may lead a man astray his whole life.

Withholding deserved praise is to be false to others. We are to help our neighbour's estate and his good name. Tell all the good you possibly can about anyone. If you see a man on the street and can tell anything good about him, do it. If you know of a kind deed done by anyone, pass it on. Our Lord liked to praise people by word and act and look.

Speaking the truth unnecessarily is false witness. There are dark spots in most lives—foolish words—sinful deeds—evil reports. Never drag up a wrong thing unnecessarily. And of all people in the world, shun the man or woman, especially if he pretends to be religious, who bridleth not his tongue, who has always something bad to say of others, who makes you feel that the world is rotten.

Remember your duty to the dead—keep their memory green.

And remember your duty to those who come after you. Leave them in possession of all the good you know about anyone, for all that is good in one comes from God, and your neighbour's character is God's character, and your neighbour himself is Christ—"Ye did it unto Me."

DENIER, YET APOSTLE

1 PETER 1. 1. PSALM XL. 2-3.

"An apostle of Jesus Christ."

EIGHT years after our Lord's death Peter was delivered from prison by the angel, to go straight to the house where men and women and at least one little girl were gathered together praying for him. Twelve years after that we meet him at Jerusalem, when Paul and Barnabas returned to give account of their mission. Paul is now a prisoner at Rome and at least another ten years have passed away. It is thirty years since Peter denied Christ—"I know not the man." They had been thirty years of noble, faithful work. One would say no man ever more completely gave up Christ than Peter did. It was after solemn warning, after many vows; from every point of view a shameless deed, a lie of the most base kind, treachery, perjury, ingratitude, meanness, the next worst to Judas's. It was a crime, we should have said, that could never have been atoned for. He left the Son of God to be crucified. Witnesses were needed and no witness was forthcoming. The other disciples fled and did not know what was happening. Peter was on the spot and was challenged.

But Peter did immediately the right thing. He repented, weeping bitterly. He went to the people of

God. He went to the grave. Christ had a special message for him. "Go, and tell Peter." There was one meeting between Christ and him of which we have no account. Peter came with a broken heart, and when they met I doubt not Peter put his arms around Christ and kissed Him and was assured of forgiveness. Later, he was publicly restored when Christ gave him the opportunity of testifying three times, "Thou knowest that I love thee."

Is not this all very cheering for any of us who have made one great sinful blunder in life?

On the day of Pentecost Peter was chosen to proclaim to the world the glory of the risen Christ, or, as one has described it, he preached Christ's coronation sermon. Peter makes no claim to be the chief of the Apostles. In intellect and character and work he was far surpassed by the Apostle Paul. Certainly Christ said, "Thou art a rock." He was the one who was first to stand up for Christ in the whole world and proclaim His Messiahship. He laid the first stone. Had it not been for him, humanly speaking, Christ would have had no followers. He opened the Kingdom of Heaven, was the very first to unfold in all its freeness the glory of the Gospel—to open wide the gate. Surely Peter would have claimed the authority had it been his. It was too vast and solemn a thing to be silent about.

A GREAT WOMAN

2 KINGS IV. 13. PSALM CXXXVIII. 6-8.

"I dwell among mine own people."

THIS was a "great woman"—great probably in wealth but certainly great in heart. She leaves her distinctive mark on everything she does. Her memorial in that respect is seen in the upper room she built for Elisha. She is one of the people who have redeemed and glorified a whole district. She has all a woman's thoughtfulness, with wonderful self-restraint—a Martha with none of Martha's weaknesses. Her determination is apparently to think only of Elisha and what he would like. And she did all in the light of the sun, not feeding him in a cave, or under cover of night, not fearing the wrath of the king, but identifying herself openly with God's cause.

She was great intellectually, as is seen in many ways, for example in her discernment of character. She perceived that Elisha was a man of God. We see it specially in her noble use of words. When her only and late-born son is taken from her she says, "It is well."

She was great, further, as a woman of action. In all she does there is a promptitude, a readiness and firmness, a fertility in planning things, and rapid decision. No wonder she could tell a man by his movements.

Also she was great in influence. Nothing could be more beautiful than her husband's implicit trust in her. Then there is her influence over Elisha, and her power with God.

And, as might be expected, she was great in trial. For long she had no child, and after God gave her a son, He took him away. Later we find she is a widow, desolate, robbed and spoiled.

Note specially her great contentment with her lot. We should not have been surprised if a woman of such power had been restless. She could have few intellectual equals, little society, and none worthy of her. No scope for her ability, one would have said, and yet among her own people there was a rare chance. She could help them in trouble, she could listen. Her own people had sorrows and trials and wants. They had minds, too, and there was more to be made of them. "Mine own people"—it is a designation of her lot and her attitude to it, a term of love. There is a finality about it.

God sent her for seven years amongst Philistines and on her return she finds her land had been seized. And here a strange thing happens. She had no wish to be spoken for to the king. She had absolutely put that aside as not worth considering. It is the king she has to speak to after all, and the man who was to do so for her was Gehazi! Let us not be too confident in making out our own future, laying out our own plans. Let us leave our future in God's hands, with resignation even in a changed lot, and that future will bring us many happy surprises.

BE GLAD AND PRAY

1 THESS. V. 16, 17. PSALM V. 2.

"Rejoice . . . Pray."

WE say it is a great thing to be contented, not to fret, to hope, to take things calmly. But far more is demanded of us. We are to rejoice—which is not always an easy thing to do. If we look at the history of one day with all its cares and troubles and vexations, we say, These things are very worrying. Even if we have no worries, things look so trifling, the household work so commonplace. We do the same thing every day, there's nothing heroic in it. How can we rejoice?

That is more especially a woman's question. A man's work stands. He begins to-morrow where he left off to-day. At the end of the year he has built a ship and you can see it, or a house and you can live in it. He has written a book and you can read it. But a woman's work is different. At the close of the year, three hundred and sixty-five times has she swept and cleaned, and in one sense there is nothing to see. Yet, it can be done rejoicing. The ability to do it implies health, strength, eyesight, the possession of a home. A wise husband will rejoice in it, a foolish husband be reproved by it and, it may be, in God's time, saved by it. The children are taught neatness,

thrift and diligence. The answering of the door may be done with a gracious, sweet courtesy, and the neighbours, perhaps, be allured to the love of Christ. Is there not reason to rejoice ?

" Pray without ceasing." If we pray little it is because we don't like it. It is like walking, or reading, or writing ; the less we do of these, the more difficult they become and the gladder we are when they are over.

The text means—don't stop praying because God does not answer you. Take the Kingdom by violence. God loves to be prayed to. He gives us many errands to His throne. He may not give us what we ask, but He never sends us away empty.

It means, also, not only to resume where we have left off, but to be always praying. There are times when we must pray and do nothing but pray ; but there is no time when we can't join prayer to our other work. God is as near us as can be. His ear is ever open. Surely it should make us rejoice and give thanks that the Eternal God is with us, always happy to speak to us and to have us speak to Him.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY GHOST

MARK I. 8-13. PSALM II. 7.

"He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost."

WE have all heard that there is a Holy Spirit, but perhaps some of us have very uncertain and vague ideas about Him. We know about God the Father; we know He loved the world and planned its salvation; we pray to Him morning and evening and say, "Our Father." And we know about Jesus Christ, the Son, Who died that we might live. Every time we pray we pray to be heard for His sake. But we don't know much about the Holy Spirit; we don't think of Him as a Person, but rather as a sort of influence, with whom we have very little to do. We ought rather to remember that the three Persons of the Godhead are equal in power and glory.

These verses bring before us in a very short space the way the Spirit deals with God's people. By nature we are estranged from God, but in His great mercy He has not taken His Spirit wholly from us yet. And that is why we are not so bad as the devil and his angels. God's Spirit restrains us. That is the difference between earth and hell. When we do wrong we feel something in us telling us we are doing wrong, and if when we have tried to do what is good we feel a sense of satisfaction, that is God's Spirit telling us that

wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness. But there is His special working referred to by John the Baptist —working only felt by the children of God. They are baptized with the Spirit. This second great work is effectual calling. We have all learned the Shorter Catechism on that question. We have often heard it ridiculed. It is the most glorious and wonderful work that ever was or ever shall be—the turning of a poor sinner into a child of God and causing him to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is God who planned redemption, Christ who secured it, the Spirit who applies it.

After the Spirit by His almighty grace has persuaded us to believe in Christ, there remains a great deal to be done before we can appear in the King's presence. We have to be sanctified—made holy—and that is the Spirit's work. In these verses we are told how He operated on our Saviour, and that shows us exactly how He will operate on us. Of course we don't receive the Spirit in the same measure, for He received Him without measure; but we receive the same Spirit. Have you ever thought of that phrase, "These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth"? They drink of His cup, and they are baptized with His baptism.

THE WELL OF HIM THAT CRIED

JUDGES XV. 19. PSALM XXXVI. 8-9

"En-hakkoré."

WE have here an illustration of the way God works deliverances for men. God likes to have a man working along with Him. All good that comes to us takes its rise in free grace, and after every wonder done to us we have to say, "Not unto us, but unto Thy Name be glory." We feel no flesh should glory, yet He says, "Ye have been My fellow-workers. Well done!"

We might say the first step God takes in great crises of history is to raise up a man. Search the Scriptures from the days of the Flood until the times of the Apostles—and in our own history—you find it so. There is a hero as well as a miracle. For a long time that hero is preparing and you often find that preparation begins with a godly mother, as in the case of Moses, Samuel, Timothy. It would have been easy for God to deliver Israel Himself—to have sent an earthquake or pestilence, but He sends Samson, as afterward He sent David. He does so because He wishes us to enter heaven as heroes: not simply as pardoned sinners, but as men worth redeeming, a fitting reward for His Son, worthy to sit with Him on His throne, worthy to embark on new enterprises for ever and ever. Oh, how gloriously He redeems

us! We enter in through the narrow gate here, but we go in like kings at the end.

The man with whom God works must work himself. We think God uses a hero as we use a tool, that we are passive in God's hand, that it was, so to speak, easy for Samson to win this fight; just as we think of a poet amid beautiful scenery dashing off a poem. Moments of inspiration come only to the man who uses his talents. When David slung his stone it was with a practised eye and hand.

Samson put forth all his might. So did Christ. God does that; and He loves to continue working. He glories in our faith and love. As it were He says, "Would you care to see more? I have more to show and more to give."

If Samson had had his way that place would only have been a memory. But when God gives Samson a drink the cup overflows. He turns the desert into a fruitful field. Many a traveller would drink of that well and be refreshed. There are green spots all over the world—in history, in biography, in daily converse. We drink and forget that cup of water may have cost a big price, may be from "the well of a man that cried."

There is a fountain for every thirsty one. It is the well of Christ who was athirst and cried. Oh! the price He paid to open that fountain. It is the well of God who cried to His son to die for us.

NO SEPARATION

ROMANS VIII. 38-9. PSALM LXII. 5-7.

" For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

THIS is not simply a promise for martyrs and confessors. It is for ordinary, common-place saints. The word " tribulation " has such a grand Biblical sound that we don't think what it means. It just means suffering, and the word " distress " means literally " anguish," or what we call " straits." It may denote any kind of extreme pain. Let me warn you against speaking of some particular pain as the worst that could be endured. We all like to magnify our troubles and say " Nothing could be worse." That is a foolish way to talk, and proves not only lack of imagination but utter want of thought. There are many kinds of straits. There is bodily distress, when a man cannot get breath, when a man cannot sleep, when there are racking pains, when he can only say, " What am I to do ? Can no one help me ? " There is distress of mind, when a man has made a big blunder in business, has become caution for a debt and is less able to pay it than the man he helped, when a clerk cannot get his books to balance and he worries himself until

he cannot think. And there is distress of soul, when one is vexed by the sins of others, when a mother sees her son or her daughter going the wrong road.

Such things lie before us all. It will not be given to any of us (unless, perhaps, God stir up some of our young people to be missionaries) to die in the high places of the field. Our biggest fight will in all probability be in some lonely dwelling, with a solitary, perhaps a sleepy, watcher at the midnight hour. But never shall we be separated from the love of Christ. That is a strong way of saying we shall be united to Him. May I not say every trial is a proof of love? that the trouble He sends on those He loves is a special mark of affection? Nay, we can even imagine Christ, in the joy of perfecting His people, rejoicing over their affliction—suffering with them and yet knowing that they will bless Him for ever and ever.

Trial makes our union with Christ closer. It shows us the exceeding sinfulness of sin. It shows us the wondrous love of Christ; just as we never knew how loving our mother's arms were until pain overtook us. It humbles us utterly, it teaches us to pray, it opens up the promises. *It will not separate us.*

PRAYED OUT OF PRISON

ACTS XII. 12. PSALM L. 15.

" Many were gathered together praying."

SOME might say, " And what was the good of that ? " How many interests and forces were arrayed against them !

(1) There was Herod, not Herod who mocked our Lord—that Herod was now a banished man ; this one was a grandson of him who slew the little children. He was a man whose seat seemed as secure as it could be. He had been thrown into prison and been released and came into favour with Caligula, and was made king. He was a man of some capacity, in the prime of life, yet even then destined, like Jonah's gourd, to destruction.

(2) There were the Jews. Three thousand saints and more there were, but they did not count. Many of them knew nothing of the issue or the danger. They could be safely neglected. In almost any other circumstances the Jews would be divided, but for once they were agreed. That door was barred. Ten years had passed since the people had clamoured for the death of God's own Son, and although Herod and Pilate found no fault in Him and Pilate was determined to let Him go, the power of the people prevailed.

(3) Peter was actually under lock and key, and things this time had been made absolutely sure. Peter

had once escaped before. He and John had been delivered by an angel, guards standing before the door. But this time guards were inside as well as outside.

(4) Besides, the facts of nature were against them. There was the great prison gate. You may break a seal if the seal has no value, and you may roll away the stone if you get help, but an iron gate! and beyond that, one ward, two wards! and at the prison doors two guards, and inside another two! and Peter himself asleep, reconciled to his position, expecting nothing!

(5) Might not some have said, What about the eternal purpose? Had not Christ said, "When thou shalt be old" some would think him old—"another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldest not"? Surely his fate was fixed. Prayer could not alter it. Yes, prayer does. God does not want to do things all of Himself. He wants them to be done for Christ's sake by those whom Christ has redeemed.

All these on one side. A humble prayer-meeting on the other, evidently mostly women. And in the book of remembrance one is named, the one that opened the door, Rhoda, a brave girl, to be trusted with the keeping of the door in such perilous times—times of persecution. Never speak ill of praying women. Their faith was not of the most perfect order—their prayer was evidently a despairing prayer—and lo! Peter is walking along the street, a free man!

THEY SLEEP TO WAKE

1 THESS. IV. 14. PSALM XLV. 10-15.

"Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."

OUR text gives us the history of the redeemed from the moment they die till the hour when they shall rise again. They "sleep in Jesus." If there is one thing the believer hopes for it is that he may be found in Christ. But when the last hour comes and he looks back on past years, the iniquities of his youth, the hills of provocation, the neglected tasks—when he thinks of infinite love on one hand and hatred on the other, no wonder the righteous man has bands in his death. No wonder his heart feels like to break, and the man or woman whom you and I would give worlds to resemble is like Christian in the valley of death—Hopeful may tell them of the Shining Ones, but they are not for them, they shall never see the King's face.

Then try to imagine the glorious awakening when the struggling soul has escaped from earth and the believer finds himself in Christ. There are some who believe that the soul becomes unconscious upon death; others, that it enters upon new activities. This we know—the soul in one moment will be refreshed. One moment of glory will banish the pain and agony of years of sin and sorrow.

The soul will not sleep as we call sleep, but will rest

in Christ. Do not you and I know what it is to be stunned with joy? To find ourselves lost in astonishment at the prospect of some happiness on earth? Is it too much to imagine that the redeemed one, freed from all sin and all care, should rest in God? On earth he lay down, he slept, for God sustained him, but he awoke in fear, afraid lest He who keeps Israel had slumbered and slept too, and if God seemed to be asleep, woke Him with the bitter word, "Carest Thou not?"

"God will bring with Him." The finest descriptions of heaven are those which are given in the simplest words, "There they shall abide." "They shall go no more out." "I go to prepare a place for you." We do well to read and love those wonderful accounts John gives us of the golden streets and gates of pearl, for they serve to assure us there is such a place as heaven, but the grandest descriptions are those which are given in simple phrase. "When I awake I shall be satisfied." Such is the phrase of our text, where in a few brief words we have brought before us the people of God at the day of judgment, with all His holy angels, when He shall bring His Son, who was mocked and slain and buried, and present Him before the assembled universe with exceeding glory and when all such as love His appearing shall be sharers in His righteousness, in His glory and His honour.

THE FAME OF OBADIAH

OBADIAH I. PSALM CVIII. 8-10.

"The vision of Obadiah."

IT would not be easy for any one of us to imagine a position in which a man would have the certainty of fame more surely than that held by Obadiah. No man, we would have said, could have been surer of being well known.

There will be many strange groups in heaven at last, groups of friends who parted on earth, the company of the apostles, the noble army of martyrs, the patriarchs, the ancestors of our Lord, or such of them as were God's children; and there will be one other company of high honour, the company of the thirty or forty men who wrote the books of the Bible.

The labour that was put upon them was immeasurably heavy—to represent God, to represent that love whose length and breadth and height are alike unsearchable. No wonder they shrank from it, and entreated that another should go in their place. No wonder when they did go they describe it as a burden—"the burden of the word of the Lord." Yet the toil was not to be compared with the glory. If any position on earth could secure fame and honour and love, surely it was the being one of those forty immortals. Who could be better worth knowing than the man who knew God? Who more worth listening to than the man who spoke as he was moved

by the Holy Ghost? Who more sure to be remembered than one whose name stands written for all time in the book of God's remembrance?

And that was the position of Obadiah. Yet, is he not only the shadow of a name? So little thought of in his own day, and by his own countrymen, that none of them considered it worth while recording when he lived, and we cannot tell till to this day; and so little thought of by us Christians that it is with difficulty we can turn up his prophecy, and those of us who do know where the book is could not have told one word that was in it before we read it to-day, and shall have utterly forgotten it all again before another Sabbath comes round. No doubt it is a very little book—one chapter—but that very fact should have made us the more anxious to know all it tells. He surely can be no ordinary man, no common ambassador, but one of unusual honour and possessed of a special mission; for it is not God's way to make a fool of a man. He never thrusts anyone into a false position. He never sends a man a warfare on his own charges.

One cannot help comparing Obadiah with Jude. We all like to have someone with us who has had the same experience as we. We can fancy those two drawing together. Each of them was permitted, as it were, one leaf in God's word—one page—five minutes' time to speak to the world. Therefore we find an energy, a fire, a consuming zeal, anger, expostulation, reasoning, questioning, entreaty, denunciation, and at the last the solemn calm of a promise and a benediction. Never one wasted, idle word.

ANGELS' PERPETUAL YOUTH

MARK XVI. 5. PSALM LXVIII. 17.

"And entering into the tomb they saw a young man."

THIS is the only place in which an angel is called young. The passage tells us what it is that does not make us old and what it is that makes us young.

It is not years that make us old. Time means life, and in the nature of things life should make us younger. We were made to live for ever, and even after we sinned God grudged to shorten our days. We don't know how old the angels are, but there had been time for them to grow in knowledge and comprehension of their destiny. The trial and fall of angels did not take place in a day.

Nor is it hard work that makes men old. For here again, to work is to be like God. A disinclination to work is both a symptom and a punishment of sin. When a man works he becomes every day fitter and fitter. The angels cease not night or day, working with all their might—flying swiftly, praying earnestly, singing, stirring up all that is in them.

Nor is it thinking that makes one old. For we were made to think. A seeker is a finder and knowledge is a pearl of great price. The man who seeks it finds ever so many things by the way. He is one who is on the eve of discoveries every hour. How

much thinking the angels do! They have entered into the thoughts of God's greatest servants. No question, no enterprise, no problem, no history, but they follow, and never forget. And above all, they followed the great plan of redemption, wondering how it was to be carried out.

Nor is it sorrow simply that makes us old. I imagine if we were to sum up our lives, or tell their landmarks, it would be by our sorrows we should remember them, our times of fear and anxiety and shame. But some angel has shared every trial with us, seen it in all its greatness and in its issue, and has never forgotten it. There is no day in which they are not grieved; and all that has gone on generation after generation. There was their anguish over their lost comrades in that day of their rebellion; but above all, the anguish of the Cross. Everything that hour seemed to go by the board—justice, friendship, gratitude, decency, even God's own promises and character; even Christ's own comprehension seemed to give way as He cried, "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

The angel is called "A young man." The angels never sinned, they never doubted, they always hoped, and trust was their whole philosophy. They had watched God and never been disappointed. They loved, they served, they told glad tidings. They had always looked young, seeing God, but that one in the sepulchre had seen the Risen Christ; and the way to be young is to see Christ and to tell the good news.

MARCHING ORDERS

MARK VI. 7-13. PSALM XVIII. 1-6.

"And he called unto Him the twelve and began to send them forth."

CHRIST sent forth His disciples "two by two"—that they might cheer one another, that they might learn of one another, that if one failed the other might perhaps succeed, and, above all, that there might be no glorying—that no one should be tempted to think he had done all.

He gave them power—the same power as He had Himself. God asks us to do His work and He offers us His strength. These disciples received power to do all Christ did. And Christ is the same to-day that He was yesterday. Every age has its own duties, necessities, trials. If Christ had lived now on earth His love would have been the same but the way of showing it would have been different. The crown that He doth wear is flourishing, His manhood is being exalted more and more, there is a new power given Him with every soul that is born. He is no longer with us, He sits at God's right hand.

We hear it said every day, We have no power; we can do nothing. But remember we have power over the devil. We can fight him and subdue him and crush him. He is hurt by every blow we give. Every time we shut our eyes to sin we deprive him of

what he loves and we weaken his assaults even upon others. We do not know the influence we have on one another; our example, our warning, our entreaty may preserve others from the lowest depths. And we have power with God. Who can tell what that means? What are the marks of having this power? Why, doing Christ's work in Christ's way. It was a very sore discipline for these disciples, who thought they were to sit on thrones, ride in chariots, and be princes, that they were just to go about as Christ went. Their work was to be for the good of souls.

Is failure possible? It is well for us if the failure lies not at our doors. You may have to wipe the dust off your feet. See that you have no testimony against yourself. But suppose you fail—your peace returns unto you. You get all the good you wished to do to others; and the way to judge whether you have done your duty or not is to ask yourself if you are gentler, kinder, holier. Or are you, because you have failed, angry and scornful? The best people are those who have been most sorely tried. They have striven and they have failed, but the blessing has returned to themselves. God has requited them and made them more Christlike. They get a double portion of His Spirit, and the more love they have shown the more they get.

GOD'S CARE FOR ANIMALS

1 CHRON. XXVII. 30. PSALM CXLVIII. 1-14.

" Over the camels also was Obil the Ishmaelite."

THE text should teach us how eager God was in Old Testament times to bring all foreigners and heathen into the household of faith and into the bond of the Covenant. From the beginning God has been the God of the stranger. " The stranger that is within thy gates " is one of the phrases He wrote with His own hand on the Tables of the Law. Old Testament history as well as prophecy is full from the beginning to the end of God's compassion towards the heathen and His desire that they should know His Name. The nations of Canaan even, whom, after four hundred years of warning and forbearance, He commanded to be uprooted and destroyed, not because they were heathen who had to be got out of the way to make room for the Israelites, but because they were cruel murderous nations, who led lives that were wicked beyond all words, and even beyond all that we can imagine—even they, if they humbly sought to give up their evil ways and make peace with Him, were given a right to all the privileges of the people of God. We see this in the story of the Gibeonites in the Book of Joshua. They came with lies in their mouths and lies in their right hand, and in great ignorance, yet,

because they in some measure did truly seek His face, were graciously received and given a place close to His altar and under the shadow of His wing.

The text also shows us the great part played in redemption by what we call the lower creation. It was his knowledge of camels that brought Obil to David's court and gave him a name and a place in God's Book. Of the camels we may say, as the Arabs say of the locusts, "They, too, are God's host." How little we know of God's dealings with the lower animals! They take a big place in our life. They work for us, feed and clothe us, suffer and die for us. They cry to God against us if we ill-use them. No doubt their joy when we treat them well rises to Him like a prayer on our behalf. They were sacrificed as types of Christ. In heaven He is the Lamb of God; so that we shall never cease to think of them in eternity. We do not know how God's Spirit speaks to them, but let us at any rate try to make a heaven for them here.

Do you know Isaiah 60? "Arise, shine; for thy light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. . . . The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; they all shall come from Sheba: they shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praises of the Lord."

DISHONEST QUESTIONS

MARK XI. 33. PSALM CII. 16-18.

"Neither do I tell you."

OUR Saviour was ever ready to answer honest questions. Neither the smallness of His audience, nor the weariness of His body, nor the heaviness of His spirit, nor the shortness of time at His disposal, nor the ignorance nor stupidity, ay, nor the pride, of those who came to Him, ever prevented Him from answering such. The woman of Samaria who refused Him a drink, Nicodemus who came to Him by night, the Greeks who sought to see Him at the last hour of His life, the thieves upon the cross—all these had only to speak to Him and He answered them with words of infinite grace and love. I want you to understand and believe that if Christ could answer publicans and sinners who earned an unholy living, and rich and haughty Jews who were too proud to come by daylight, and thieves who were justly crucified, it must be something very awful that will keep Him from answering you and me.

The highest men in the Jewish nation came in pomp and dignity; the people made way; none dared touch them, and they surrounded Jesus. "By what authority," say they, "doest thou these things?" A harsh question that! What business have you here? But note Christ's majesty. A carpenter of Nazareth, who has not where to lay His head, asks but one

question and they turn away in confusion to consult among themselves.

Why did He not answer them? Simply because they did not wish an answer. They wished to entrap Him in His words. If He had said, "From earth," He was an impostor; if "From Heaven"—a blasphemer.

He did not give them a direct answer and yet He gave them better. He offered to talk with them. He reminds them of John. They had asked John the question three years before, "Art thou the Messiah?" And he had pointed to Christ; so Christ now refers them back to that and says, "Has that question not been answered to you already?"

We often come to God with unholy thoughts and wicked imaginations, and we wish to get rid of them, we feel they are dishonouring to God. We come again and again, like Balaam, and ask the same question. We know they are bad, but we do not wish to believe them bad. We say, "Is it wrong?" And Christ says, "I'll tell you, if you answer me one question. Do you believe the Bible to be true?" And we say, "We do." Then Christ says, "If you believe that book, does it not tell you you are wrong? Are you prepared to take the answer you don't like, or only the answer that suits you?"

This is the glory of Christianity: it gives a true answer on everything. Ancient oracles were ambiguous and uncertain, but our God gives a clear, definite, distinct answer. Are you prepared to take it? Do you not know it already?

EDOM'S INHUMANITY

OBADIAH 1. PSALM CII. 13-15.

"Thus saith the Lord God concerning Edom."

THIS whole prophecy is directed against Edom. And the same thing is to be found in many of the prophets. How is it that Jeremiah in his Lamentations, describing the downfall of Israel, feels nothing bitterer than the rejoicing of Edom? How is it Ezekiel speaks more fiercely concerning them than any other people: "They shall know My vengeance?" And above all things, why is it that in one of the most wondrous prophecies of Isaiah concerning Christ, that which describes the loneliness of His conflict as He trod the wine-press of God's wrath, He is spoken of as coming from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah—garments dyed in blood?

A very sinful and foolish notion is held by many that in Old Testament times God did nothing for anyone but the Jews—that everyone had to give way to them—that none might stand in their way. Surely it might be remembered that God's love was not a thing that sprang into being yesterday. Those Edomites only were slain who deserved to be slain. If any made submission they were saved. God, as it were, tried to find excuses for them: "Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite." Again, "I will not give thee a footbreadth of Mount Seir." God wanted

the two nations to dwell together in unity. The Edomites were the sons of Esau. You know how he lost the blessing. He lost it because he did not want it. But by the mercy of God the two brothers were reconciled, and it was God's wish they should continue so. Now, if the Edomites had done as God wanted them God would have found a way of bringing them into the Covenant. But they continued to despise their birthright and wasted their opportunity. When the Chaldeans came these Edomites gloried in the downfall of Jerusalem. "Down with it!" they cried, as they saw its walls attacked. They cut off the stragglers, delivered up the fugitives, plundered the weary, gloried in God's judgment upon Israel.

What is the lesson for you and me?

The most shameless character on earth is the man who finds pleasure or profit in another's ruin, even although that ruin be deserved, and no people deserved it more than Israel. If we do rejoice, the joy must have no personal element.

There are no sadder or fiercer words in the prophets or the Psalms than our Saviour's own words: "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

And yet Edom, too, may be the Lord's. We read in Mark iii. 8, "A great multitude came to Jesus from Galilee, and from Judæa, and from *Idumæa* (i.e., Edom)."

CHRIST REFUSING THE ANODYNE

MATT. XXVII. 34. PSALM XXXVIII. 11.

"And when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink."

THE hours our Lord spent upon the cross are the greatest, the most wonderful hours the world ever saw; and we are justified in examining every word, every silence, every look, every gesture, provided always we do so very reverently. All our Lord's life, and especially at the last, there was not a moment in which something of great importance was not happening.

This offer of wine was evidently made in kindness. It was the custom of some humane souls to provide such stupefying potions for those undergoing crucifixion in order to make them less sensitive to pain. Christ needed strengthening. He had already passed through sufferings unspeakable. It had been a week crowded with events full of pain of all kinds. His heart was very sore. He had seen Judas's treachery. He had seen His other disciples ignorant of their own weakness and sure of their own strength. He had been dragged through the streets at midnight, had been scourged, spat upon, accused of blasphemy. He had seen bad men at their worst, and good men false to themselves. It was the hour and power of darkness.

Let us remember that He was one who longed for

human love as no man or woman ever did. There are some people who glory in taking no help from anyone, who feel pride in being lonely, neglected. It was not so with Christ. Whether it was a cup of cold water, a meal, a bed, or a kind thought, He was always willing and eager to receive kindness. How gently He spoke to the women that bewailed him. I have no doubt amid the cries and the jeers of the crowd He would try to thank Simon for carrying His cross. He accepted the vinegar mingled with gall, but we read —" When He had tasted thereof, He would not drink." Why ? He would have no chance to say why, or to thank those who offered it, save by a look, a smile of love.

We now know that if He had taken that draught and deadened His pain, or lost consciousness, it would have been said He did not know what He was doing. We cannot tell how much Christ had to do. It was not merely dying—He had to taste *death and all that death meant* in those seven hours that lay before Him. He had special, unexpected work to do. He had to provide for His mother, to help the penitent thief, to pray to God, as well as to face Satan's rage and the world's wickedness. This was a real temptation and it came unexpectedly—the temptation to get easily through death ; but the moment He knew what it was He rejected it, and Satan was foiled.

MESSAGES FROM PRISON

JEREMIAH XXXVII. 17. PSALM XL. 1-2.

" The king asked Jeremiah [the prisoner], Is there any word from the Lord? And Jeremiah said, There is."

WE do not appreciate how much God has done for prisoners and done for the world through them.

Of the first prisoner in the Bible, an innocent man, it says, " The Lord was with him." There is no part of Joseph's career more honourable to him than the fact that he was a prisoner. A prison, if it means anything, means shame. Yet God vindicated the character of the innocent, and made it a place of power. As in the case of Joseph, so in the case of Paul. " Lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee."

We see God making prison a place of joy—Paul and Silas, weary, cold, hungry, bleeding and dishonoured, sang praises to God.

It is a place where pardon is found. It was in a prison that the most direct question was ever put and the most direct answer ever given. " What must I do to be saved? " cried the cruel, hardened jailer at Philippi. And Paul answered, " Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Men have been saved in prison and come out new men, but rarely, rarely have men fallen and regained their position. They go down to the grave with a stigma on them. Is there any word of the Lord for

this? Yes, look at Samson. He wasted his strength for nought, sold the secret of the Lord to an ungodly woman whose deceitfulness he had proved repeatedly. He forgot his parent's vows, his country's liberties, and the honour of his God. He was grinding in the prison house, blind and guilty, the victim of his own lust. Howbeit God visited him. There he learned what he had never learned at his mother's knee, or in the hour of miracle, or in the day of victory.

To return to Paul once more. What he wrote as a prisoner has coloured all our thoughts of God. We may not be aware of it, but our knowledge of the way of God would be very different but for the Epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. They open up the purpose, the method, the plan, the need, the result of Christ's atoning work.

Is there any message about death? One of the most touching books is 2 Timothy. "I am now ready to be offered." Death has lost all terrors. "I know whom I have believed."

Look at John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Is there any word from the Lord? "I was in the isle called Patmos." There he saw Christ, and heaven opened, and the multitude of the redeemed, and the Holy City, and heard the words "Whosoever will, let him come."

Is not that God the same God still? The book next to the Bible that has given most of us our view of God is "Pilgrim's Progress," written in prison. I think we may well say God has vindicated Himself as listening to the cry of the prisoner.

BIBLE KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

ACTS XVIII. 24. PSALM CXIX. 9-16.

"Mighty in the Scriptures."

THAT means in ordinary language that Apollos "knew his Bible well." The Bible at that time was simply the Old Testament Scriptures. The expression is very striking—"mightily powerful." It is the same word in the Greek that Paul uses when he says "*Mighty* to the pulling down of strongholds"; and again, "God willing to show forth His *power*." And it occurs in Mary's song: "He that is *mighty* hath done for me great things." It is important that what we do know should be a source of strength, and knowledge of the Scriptures is power. There are a great many books, even valuable, rare, artistic, unique books, that should be burned. There are other books and subjects of which we say, If a man knows them well we know he is a wise man. Few of us have ever the chance of meeting great men, but we can all take a wise man's books and shut to our door, and read and re-read them. We have his best thoughts before us, the product of his life and his experience.

The man who knows the Bible well has the best thoughts of the best men of a whole race. He has command of a whole literature—to say nothing of the

fact that he has the opportunity of knowing the very secret of the Almighty and all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hid in Christ. The man who knows his Bible well is bound to be a man of power.

How few of us read the Bible because we love it! We read it for duty's sake (and it is something to do that), but few read it from pure delight. We think we have no time in the hurry of our daily life, and yet how much time passes in which we are not conscious of a single thought in our minds.

There is no other book we can so easily carry with us. A phrase, a verse, even a word, might be our meditation all the day long—a treasury, yet how few of us remember even what we have read! Apollos had the same difficulties as we. Alexandria was at that time the most learned city in the world. It had the grandest museum and library. It lay in the very centre of the known world, and to a scholarly young Jew all that must have been tempting in the extreme. *But he found time.*

The Bible gives us weapons wherewith to conquer sin. It lets us *see at once* when a suggestion is a temptation. When Christ was on earth it was not argument, but quoting the Scriptures, that put Satan to flight. Our Saviour obeyed the Scripture He quoted.

THE NAME ON HIS VESTURE

REV. XIX. 16. PSALM XXII. 17-18.

"And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

THE first time raiment is mentioned in the Bible it is a mark of sin and shame. Yet it has been redeemed like that sinful body which it covers—redeemed by the Son of God. There was always on His vesture this name.

Look at Him in His first robes—swaddling bands, yet proclaimed by the angel, "A Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." There is no room for Him in the inn; He is laid in a manger—ay, but King of Kings! That manger has glorified every human cradle since. What mother is there that has not looked reverently on her babe? But who ever looked as Mary did, and Joseph did, at that Holy Thing? How He compelled love and admiration and wonder!

A woman came and touched the hem of His robe. Earthly kings used to be thought capable of curing disease by their touch; and still their hands convey honours. But what do their robes do? They excite wonder, and envy; they hide defects; but you must not come near them! Here, the very robe carries healing.

Come now to the vestibule of Heaven. Moses and Elias come from glory. Christ, the Son of Man, is praying, and even as He prays His raiment becomes

white and glistening, proclaiming His majesty and partaking of His glory. The woman's touch tells of the union of His body and His dress—its helpfulness, its power to minister; here we see its power to share His glory, its worthiness to be worn among the ransomed of the Lord.

In the upper room "He laid aside His garments." We fling ours down carelessly. Once in a while we thank God for our raiment. But to Christ His dress was a gift from God. He "girded Himself with a towel" like a slave, but there more than ever like a king, "knowing that He came from God and went to God."

By a strange providence both Herod and Pilate clothed Christ in royal apparel. They did it in mockery. How often they must have felt themselves that their faces were unworthy of their dress, but our Lord glorified even that insult by His meekness, truth and holiness.

Then for the last time He was unrobed, stripped, saying, with kinglike grace, "Father, forgive them."

And at last, He is in His grave-clothes, wrapped in fine linen, buried as a king, with no odour of death, but abundance of sweet spices as out of the ivory palaces, and guards standing at the door.

And after His resurrection, what did He wear? A robe made by God's own hand, and what king ever wore that?

And now what must be the glory of His appearance in Heaven? Girded with gladness, majesty, honour, power, clothed with light as with a garment.

MY MOVING TENT

2 PETER I. 14. PSALM XXXIX. 4-5.

" Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle."

A DYING man is always a solemn spectacle. We look with interest on anyone who is starting on a journey or a long voyage, but there is no experience like death —in a little time to see what no eye ever saw, to know the most important of all secrets, to be either for ever with the Lord, or cast out from His presence. Do people in general know that they are dying ?

At times we see a godly man growing holier, wiser, gentler. He is getting ready. But we don't put everything together till after he is gone. Some men feel their strength is giving way, they have a keener sense of Divine things, they are like practised seamen who deem they are drawing nigh to some country. No land is visible, but clouds and waves and noise of breakers and many other things tell of a change at hand. Happy are they who feel they are getting done with the things of earth because heaven is drawing nearer and becoming more desirable.

Christ had spoken to Peter of his death long before. Now doubtless Christ gave him another sign. Peter speaks of it as the " putting off of his tabernacle." It is a little house in which the immortal spirit dwells —not a continuing place of abode ; it is easily taken

down. It is one of the strange and beautiful sights in the East—rows and rows of tents, making a busy little village as it were : the morning comes and you find all have silently stolen away You see the remains of their fires, the marks of their tent-pins, but the people have gone. A tent is easily shaken. The pole sways, the sides flap, wind and rain beat in on it. And so with our bodies. Parts of them are frail and weak, they get many a rude shake and we do not always use them well.

But Peter also speaks of his death as his " decease," " his exodus." He remembers that was the word applied to our Saviour's death by Moses and Elias. The Exodus was the supreme crisis in Israel's history and the hour of their greatest weakness : a host marching out at the dead of night into an unknown world—fleeing in fear, and yet how safe and certain of deliverance. Christ was " crucified in weakness," yet that exodus of His was our deliverance.

How does Peter prepare for his own exodus ? It was a terrible death that was in store for him. He was to be crucified—and crucified head downwards. We should not have wondered if Peter had dwelt a little on the dark prospect before him—if he had tried to win some sympathy—to secure for himself some rest and peace. But no ; he determines to work to the very last : " Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things."

LOVE'S LOWLY TASK

JOHN XIII. 5. PSALM LI. 7.

"He began to wash the disciples' feet."

CHRIST washed their feet because He loved their feet. Love overflowed. Love made Him agree from eternity to die. Love upheld Him when the hour came. The disciples should have washed His feet, for He was weary. Never had there been such a week of toil and sorrow, and well they knew He loved to be loved. He looked for comforters, but Peter heeded not, although he saw the pitcher and the basin standing there for use. Peter should have said, "Thou shalt not wash their feet; I will do it," but that would have looked as if he were not the greatest. So he sat still while Christ poured out water, laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. The disciples must have been astonished when after He had sat down He said, "I have given you an example." They hankered, as we all do, after wealth and position. "What shall we have?" they had asked. "When you are King we shall be princes! If the King honours us so, what will not others be compelled to do?"

But alas! what a downfall it would be to them. "I have done this, why? To let you see what you ought to do to others." After honour, as well as before

it, comes humility. This, then, was to be their glory —serving, humbling themselves. It was only asking them to be like Him, and that meant His Spirit, His work, His joy, His reward, and, at the last, a seat on His throne.

Possibly some of them had a faint glimmering that it was a rebuke to their pride. Had they not many a time disputed among themselves who should have the pre-eminence? They took it perhaps as their right. Service from Christ was no new thing. Perhaps their eyes were blinded. There is not one of us who has not allowed his mother to do a hundred things he would not have allowed a stranger to do. It did not occur to them Christ did it out of overflowing love—it was a real joy to Him, His heart went out to them. He loved their feet for the rough roads they would have to go. He foresaw the day when they would be weary with journeyings, the day when they would be made fast in the stocks and bound with fetters; ay, and the nails driven through them to fasten them to a cross. They understand it all now, and in the light of heaven ever more and more they marvel at the meekness of the Son of God.

In all Christ does for us there is always a purpose to be completed. The trial that comes is but the first step. It is not the end in itself. It is the making possible the fulfilment of something far greater than we contemplated. That purpose goes on through time and eternity. No part of it will be hidden. "Thou shalt know hereafter."

THE ANOINTED ONE

LUKE VII. 46. PSALM XXIII. 5.

"She hath anointed My feet with ointment."

THIS was one of the great and happy moments in the life of our Lord. In the Bible He is called the "Anointed" 600 times. Jesus is His human name. "Anointed" means first of all that He was set apart for the special work of redemption—set apart by the Father and the Holy Spirit. Such a name as the "Appointed" might have been given Him, or the "Sent," but "Anointed" conveys the idea of joy, happiness, honour—not simply the honour of the Son, but of the Father and the Holy Spirit; the sense of gladness—that it was possible for the Creator to make a being whose nature He Himself could take. No words can express the satisfaction, the joy, the ineffable delight of the words—"My Son, in whom I am well pleased." The whole of eternity is filled with the odour of that ointment.

Now, here our Lord had met with a rebuff. We all know how it feels to be coldly received—to get a very poor welcome. Here was come the King of Glory, eager to be welcomed, whom all angels adore. "Thou gavest Me no kiss"—treatedst Me with no affection—barely with civility. Why did He not withdraw? Because He was anointed with the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of longsuffering and meekness.

The Spirit anointed Him by bringing this woman—by letting her hear where Christ was, by giving her courage to come in ; then by breaking her heart and giving her the relief of tears. That woman knew no Pharisee would touch her or allow her to touch him. When her first tear fell on the Lord's feet, doubtless she trembled, but, as the thirsty ground rejoices in the rain, and the hunted hart in the waterbrooks, so did Christ rejoice for the promise that was in that warm tear. "She hath not ceased to kiss My feet." She was, although she did not know it, anointing His feet to the burial. She was putting her sins on them. The ointment that was meant to entice souls to sin was consecrated to the noblest use. If ever anything was redeemed from an unholy use, it was that ointment.

We who read the story cannot catch the rapture of joy in the voice of Christ, nor—for He had sisters of His own—its unspeakable tenderness. It was a foretaste of victory, for if there are any of whom one almost despairs it was such as she.

And who can tell of the effect on Simon ? It may be some of us are like him. Is it not good to know that Christ has somewhat to say to *us* ? God wishes us also to anoint Him ; and to-day if the thought of sin takes hold of us, do not let us harden our hearts. Let us come and tell Him all.

Christ would go away rejoicing. The odour of that ointment would rise to His head and envelop His heart. It was a fresh consecration. When He said "Thy sins are forgiven thee," He was claiming the crown by faith, in hope.

HABAKKUK'S GREAT WATCHWORD

GALATIANS III. 11. PSALM XLVI. 1-5.

"The just shall live by faith."

"No man," said Melanchthon, "ever came nearer Paul than Martin Luther." They were alike in character and in history. And to no man in the Bible was Luther more indebted than to Paul. You remember Paul's words, "I must also see Rome." You know how he did see it. Not a free man travelling of his own accord, visiting a few lowly Christians, but a prisoner who was to speak before kings and shake the world to the end of time. Even so with Martin Luther. It was after he had been a monk for many years that he was sent to Rome on behalf of his order. In sore distress by reason of his sin, no man ever strove more to be sure of God's favour, yet all in vain. No one could help him, and when the order came for him to go to Rome he went with a joyous heart, walking the whole way, barefoot and penniless, getting a night's shelter, now in a monastery, now in a peasant's house. He was to see Rome, a place where the Saints dwelt. Above all he was to see the Pope of Rome, God's Vicar upon earth. "Blessed Rome" he cried, as he entered its gates. "Blessed Rome, sanctified by the blood of the Martyrs!" But when there, he was disappointed if ever man was. He saw cardinals riding in gilded chariots. There

were luxury and art, magnificent churches, the finest paintings in the world, everything to please the eye, but there was unbelief, profanity, debauchery, everything there for sale, and especially the souls of men. Still trying to find peace, he went to every shrine, and said masses for the souls of his friends, climbed on his knees up Pilate's staircase, and there it was that the words flashed upon his mind—"The just shall live by faith." He fled from Rome. "Adieu," he said, "let all who would lead a holy life depart from Rome. Everything is permitted in Rome except to be an honest man."

The words, "The just shall live by faith," are quoted three times in the New Testament. They are not Paul's own. They were given to the prophet Habakkuk, given to him, too, at a time of despondency. Isaiah's famous prophecy, beginning, "Who hath believed our report?" uttered in his saddest hour, was his grandest and most powerful. So with Habakkuk's famous prayer. He little thought his words were to be amongst the most powerful in history. This is God's way. He wishes a great many to rejoice together. God likes to add to the number of His messengers.

Some casual sentence, forgotten the moment it is uttered, may stick and bear fruit, as in Habakkuk's case, 600 years after in the life of Paul, and 1,500 years after that, in the life of Luther, and through him in the history of the world ever after.

BEARING CHRIST'S BURDEN

MARK XV. 21. PSALM LXXXVII. 34.

" They compel one Simon a Cyrenian to bear His cross."

BEFORE the eyes of men and angels the Son of God was led as a malefactor to die, the Maker of the world, who held the ocean in the hollow of His hand, staggering under His cross. It was absolutely necessary that someone should bear it for Him.

If it had been left to us to imagine who it was they found to do it, our difficulty would have been whom to choose. Had He not healed many lepers, blind, lame, sick, and pardoned many sinners? Had He not taught His disciples to bear one another's burdens?

Had the verse said simply, " They compel one Simon," we still should have found it hard to decide which of the many Simons to whom He had forgiven so much it was who owed Him this debt. We should have said, Simon, Christ's own brother, who had seen His holy youth and manhood. But no: " To mother's son an alien He became." Was it that Simon in whose house Christ had dined, and who was rebuked for not showing the ordinary courtesy of a host to his Guest? Surely he will make amends now and refresh the weary feet he had once refused to wash, and rest the bleeding head he once refused to anoint. It was not he. Was it Simon the leper, in whose house the

woman had broken the alabaster box of ointment on her Saviour's head ? He had heard Christ's promise of an everlasting memorial of her deed. He had heard Christ speak of being anointed for His burial, and now when he saw the Saviour treading the road to death surely he would grasp at the last chance he would ever have of showing pity to his Lord and winning an immortal heritage of glory. It was not he. But surely we might hope it was that Simon to whom our Lord said, " Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not," and he said to Him, " Lord, I am ready to go with thee both to prison and to death." No. It was not Simon Peter.

Another Simon was raised up—a Cyrenian—to take the place of those whose faith had failed.

There are many willing to do big things—to preside at meetings—to say a good word for Christ to an appreciative audience, but few to bear Christ's cross. Go you and do the painful, difficult, unwelcome task that no other cares to do.

Simon was probably at first unwilling, but that did not deprive him of his reward. His sons, Alexander and Rufus, became Christ's disciples. Simon's task, begun in resentment, no doubt ended in love. There have been many detained before the Lord—impressed into God's house—sorry they came near it, who long years afterwards have looked back on that day as the brightest of their lives.

UNWEPT, UNHONOURED AND UNSUNG

2 CHRON. XXI. 20. PSALM XXXIV. 16.

" And departed without being desired.'

THERE is a sad honesty about these words. Jehoram's people were gentle to the name he bore—they buried him in the sepulchre of his fathers, but for all that he departed without being desired—nobody wanted him, nobody pretended to want him. We are not accustomed in ordinary life to speak thus plainly of the dead. However little we have loved them, however much we have feared them, we try at least to call up a few commonplaces and compose our countenances for a little.

We are surprised to find the truth so plainly spoken about a king and a king's son. People are wont to say in extenuation of the faults of princes that they have peculiar trials and peculiar temptations. But so have we all. Each of us has his own little world, and trials no other knows of. But princes, like ourselves, have the offer of grace according to their need, and strength according to their day. If they have a thousand trials they have ten thousand encouragements. If there are many things to lead them astray they have many to lead them right.

The words make us think of what a man should be. We should be like Christ. And was not one of

His grandest names "The Desire of all nations"—One for whom the world wearied, the author of all love, the goal of all hope, the satisfier of every longing, the fulness of God prepared for the emptiness of man? And of His fullness we may all receive, and grace for grace. Need I remind you of what one soul may be to another? Take an ordinary happy home where every day the utmost ingenuity is shown in planning kindnesses. What pride and honour and joy a parent may be the means of to a child! What happiness may not you and I impart to every one we meet! A look at us might hearten people. Our voice might cheer, our hand be like the arm of God. But how much more might we be to souls burdened with sin? What words can describe the affection a saint has for the man that led him heavenward? I trust there are some here to-day who can never speak or think of some departed saint without an overflowing heart.

Those of you who are parents, think you not your sons and daughters now in glory will have told long ere this of your faith and holy life? Those of you who have ever helped a soul, has not the report of it preceded you, and however glad the welcome you received at any home from anyone on earth, it is nothing compared to that exulting joy and gladness that shall meet you as you enter into the palace of the King. But, oh, to depart without being desired—to have done nothing—to have left no blank—to have no tear shed—who would not fear *that?*

A TIME TO BE SILENT

MARK IX. 9. PSALM CXVI. 5.

"And as they came down from the mountain, He charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of Man were risen from the dead."

THE command to be silent about the vision shows that Christ thought more of us than He did of Himself. We all know in daily life how even in honouring others we like to honour ourselves. A minister sometimes describes his audience as "a few empty benches"—you can imagine him saying, "I had intended to give an address on such and such a subject, but when I saw hardly anyone there I made only a few simple remarks." Now that is human, but it is not divine. If we had been told of the Mount of Transfiguration and been asked "Guess how many were present," we should have said "Thousands." We should have thought it was when Christ saw a multitude. But no. Can you imagine Christ saying, "There is an audience of 5,000 people. I will pour out My Spirit on that large audience. It is not worth My while going where there are only a few?" If there were no chance for us but in crowds, where should we be in the hour of sickness and loneliness, or in the darkness of the night? If ever you have a word to say, a kindness to show, even although there be but one to hear it, but one to see it, do it as in the presence of an immortal spirit, of one who may be an heir of all things, a king, a priest, to God.

The vision was intended for the disciples themselves. Each of those three men had days of sorrow and trial before them. It was only six days since Peter had had to be reproved by reason of his ignorance. He thought it absurd, inconceivable, that Christ should die. Now he must hear it from the lips of the redeemed in glory. James and John had been anxious to obtain the two highest seats in heaven. Not only had they to be prepared for the terrible shattering of their hopes that was so nigh at hand, they had to be strengthened for the fiery trials of life, one of them for an early death, a second for a far harder conflict and a death ten times more painful, while for the third there was in store almost four score years of tribulation, persecution and disappointment. If we are God's children we shall have glimpses of the Divine glory, and we might like to tell the world the story of our experience. We may say, If I am not to be allowed to tell of my feelings, what is the good of my experience? Remember, to tell it now might be fatal. Peter and James and John questioned among themselves what the rising from the dead should mean. If they had reported the vision what could they have said? Why they had not a grip of it themselves. They " wist not." There are things to be laid up in the Ark as well as things to be used the day they come. And there may be an hour in the future in which we shall remember the experience we had that we wished to tell—the good of which we could not see unless we told it, and in that hour we shall know the need of the experience and the need of the silence.

A HALLOWED CHAMBER

2 KINGS IV. 10. PSALM CI. 1-2.

"Let us make a little chamber on the wall, and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick."

THIS is a delightful story. We fancy we see the hostess, and the guest—the great woman, and the greater prophet—and the little chamber. It is one of the domestic interiors of the Bible and as pretty a picture as can be found in all literature. Let us consider three marks of the little chamber and contrast it in these particulars with other three dwelling-places elsewhere minutely described in God's Word.

(1) Its *holiness*. It was because Elisha was a holy man of God that that woman prepared the little room. There is another chamber in the Bible—the place where God Himself dwelt, the Holy of Holies. The furniture of it was a throne—a mercy seat, a holy God dwelling between the cherubim resting on the Ark, and in the Ark the tables of the law—a God without sin yet pardoning sin. In Elisha's room there was the foot-stool for kneeling on. His holiness consisted in his crying for pardon, in his confessing iniquity—a man feeling his helplessness. It was a place to be alone.

Have we such a room in our homes? What is our strongest association with it?

(2) Its *plainness*. Plain though it was, do we not

feel that that little chamber was remarkable for comfort? All that was needed by night or day was there. Contrast it with another house—the palace of King Solomon, which took thirteen years to build and was four hundred feet square. Think of its rows of pillars, its throne of ivory, its footstool of gold. And Solomon's bed, "three score men about it, each with his sword on his thigh for fear in the night." Elisha surrounded by multitudes of the heavenly hosts is a far grander figure than King Solomon.

(3) Its *sadness*. No sweeter chamber do we read of, yet is not everything there suggestive of sin, and sorrow, and suffering? Contrast it with the "many mansions." That bed meant that Elisha would be weary; but in heaven there is no weariness, no need for sleep. That stool—no need for it there—the former things have passed away. "They shall sit with Me upon My throne." That candlestick—what a tale it tells of a short day and darkness! And the candle itself goes out. There the Lamb is the light thereof. That bed was a bed of death. Many a sob rose up from the heart of the mother and of the prophet in that room, but there—there is no more sorrow, nor crying, nor death. It was a little chamber and a lonely one. A stranger could not intermeddle; but there will be no closed doors in Heaven, no loneliness, no hidden sorrow, no solitary joy, but a multitude that no man can number, and every one of them will know the secret of the Almighty.

HE KNOWS

LUKE XII. 7. PSALM CXLVII. 4-5.

"The very hairs of your head are all numbered."

WE have here a call to wonder, a call to trust, and a call to work.

One naturally asks, Is this really true? Or is it just a strong method of stating the doctrine of God's protection? I think Christ really meant it. It is involved in the very idea of infinity. The power and knowledge of God are not only great, but as great as can be. Infinite means without bounds. When we read that God names the stars, weighs the earth in a balance, it means not only knowledge we have not got, but knowledge we cannot conceive—knowledge we can hardly credit. God by His very nature must know all things, see all things, remember all things. Wonderful as this was to the Apostles, how much more wonderful to us! The telescope, the microscope, are keys that have opened innumerable chambers of the King's palace. Just because men have dared great things for God, God has opened up His treasures to them. When Christ came, one would have thought God could do no more. Yet it was a little world then. Now we know that every drop of water is an ocean, every star is a sun, every leaf is a book, every stone is a monument, a record, every particle of dust is a little

world whose history could fill volumes. Not only good in everything but God in everything. His ways are past finding out, yet He says, "Seek, and ye shall find." Does it not show the condescension of our Lord Jesus Christ? He made the worlds, He had a whole eternity of infinite knowledge, yet He gave it all up, left His throne, and became one of us, had to ask questions. Men were astonished at His wisdom; would they not have been more astonished had they known the wisdom He had laid aside?

If this knowledge shows us God's power, does it not much more show us His love? Why should He take such interest in us? His knowing is a definite act. He puts our wanderings in His book, our tears in His bottle. The expression shows His love at every period of our life. The hair of the head more than anything else about us shows at what stage of life we are—the infant, the boy, the strong, bearded man, the hoary head and the thin locks of age. And at every step God watches us and cares for us. Should we not trust such an inexhaustible store of power and love?

There is a call here to holiness, to consecration. The uncut locks of the Nazarite in the Old Testament were a symbol that he belonged to God. His body with all its powers must be devoted to Him. A woman wiped Christ's feet with her hair. Let there be no pride or vanity. All that we have comes from Him and should go back to Him.

SATAN'S SCORN FOR HIS DUPES

ACTS XIX. 15. PSALM CXL. 4.

" Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye ? "

THERE are very few sayings of the devil reported in God's Word that we could describe as thoroughly honest. He is a liar from the beginning. There is no doubt that the tendency of sin is to ruin the intellect as well as the heart. A bad, clever man will make mistakes that the humblest child of God never would. The reason why we are to beware of Satan's devices—why they are called wiles, craft, subtlety—is not because he is clever, but because we are fools. He was once a spirit of surpassing wisdom, but he broke away from God, and thousands of years of sin have not sharpened his intellect. They have blunted it. His present subtlety is but the remains of a noble heritage destroyed at the creation of the world.

Take any vice—theft, drunkenness, uncleanness—of which the folly and madness are as apparent as anything can be: yet Satan has the hardihood to tell us his ways are pleasantness and his paths are peace, and that God is a hard, austere man.

Once or twice, however, in Scripture God has recorded sayings of Satan's in which he outwits himself. There is that one about Job—" Thou hast put a hedge about him." There is that one—" I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God." And there is this

wonderful one—" Jesus I know, Paul I know, but who are ye ? "

Men at all times have been fond of magic and trickery. These men saw Paul working miracles, and the one charm, the one phrase, was—" In the name of Jesus." That seemed a magical phrase, and they would try it too. They tried it, and the devil spoke these words to them—" Jesus I know " etc., words that make us hope and devils tremble.

Here is knowledge ending in contempt. Satan must know and despise every ungodly man ; but an ungodly man who uses God's name profanely, foolishly, that man Satan despises most.

Here we have a striking scene showing us Satan's terror. " Jesus I know. I rebelled against Him, I tempted Him, I crucified Him, I know Him. He is holy and almighty. I have been conquered by Him. I hate Him. And Paul I know. He served me once. I made him fall. He is but a weak, sinful man, but a man to whom the name of Christ is everything. I know him and I fear him. But who are ye ? " They might have said, " Who are we ? We have obeyed and served you all our days. We are no friends of Christ. We are bringing Him into contempt. We are doing Him more dishonour than we are doing you."

Even after they have done all for the devil, like Judas they get but thirty pieces of silver, the scorn of the men who used them, and the rope to hang themselves. Who are ye ? Ye have no right to do one Christlike action.

A MOTHER'S MISAPPREHENSION

GEN. IV. 25. PSALM XX. 1-12.

"For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew."

THESE are the last recorded words uttered by Eve, whose age is the greatest of any woman we read of in the Bible. She was the mother of all living. No woman had ever such a sword piercing her heart, save Mary, our Lord's mother. Eve had sorrows such as no other could possibly have.

We see here a mother's *memory*. One of the difficult questions in life is this—"Can a woman forget her sucking child?" Fond as a father's heart may be and is, it cannot compare with a mother's. A father forgets his dead children. Men have forgotten even their number, their birthdays, their dying days, but a mother rarely. It is in this women come nearest to God. In heaven children will find out how dearly their mothers loved them.

There is a mother's *shame*. How happy Adam and Eve must have been when Cain was born, we cannot imagine. They themselves had come perfect from the hand of God and had no childhood to recollect. Cain was the first baby in the world; and the mystery of helplessness, growth, learning, was all new and marvellous. No wonder Eve said, "I have gotten a

man from the Lord." But the smile, the joy, the hope of childhood changed into the sullen look of the lad, into the man utterly unlovable. His parents must have told him their tragic history, and we may guess that the man who killed his brother was never an affectionate son. "Nemo repente fit turpissimus." His character must have shown out in great contrast with that of Abel. Then came the tragedy of their life. Had Abel died, that would have been hard enough to bear; but to be murdered by his brother! Had there only been time for a last word! But their son went out one day, and they never saw him again.

We have here a mother's *hopes*. There is an awful silence in the Bible about Adam, as if his misery and despair could not be described. But the silence is eloquent. The very fact that he left Eve to name Seth says much, I think, for his befitting humility. There had been shame and failure by Cain, but Eve had hopes that all might yet be regained. There were the promises of God. Had there not been promises life could not have been borne.

We see here a mother's *mistake*. Seth came, *not* instead of Abel, but instead of Cain. He was in addition to Abel. They did not know much about the other world. They knew something—but not that Abel was still theirs. Abel has a place all his own in history, the first man to receive dying grace, the first to enter heaven, the first crown for Christ, a man greatly beloved through all time, especially by children.

SEALED ORDERS

ACTS IX. 6. PSALM. XXV. 4-5.

"Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

IT was my lot when a lad to live as tutor in a house in Fifeshire that had been built by a Captain Maitland out of the prize money he received for capturing a French man-of-war. He was well known in his day as the Commander of the *Bellerophon*, the man to whom Napoleon surrendered a few days after his defeat at Waterloo. There was an old lumber-room in the house full of papers, old uniforms, and such things as such a man would be likely to accumulate in the exercise of his profession. Specially interesting was a number of documents marked "Sealed Orders," signed either by a Lord of the Admiralty or by a superior officer. These were not to be opened until the ship had been a certain time at sea.

The giving of sealed orders is a witness to the untrustworthiness of man. Not only were there spies to whom any knowledge might be worth a King's ransom, but a captain had to be guarded against the blandishments of human affection. The only guarantee that the captain of a ship could give that he would not tell was that he did not know. For the wife or daughter who got a secret and told it either deliber-

ately or unconsciously would be the very woman incapable of appreciating the mischief she had done or of judging the failure which her weakness had brought about.

But further, it is a great tribute to the perfect honour and obedience of the captain. It seems strange that a man ready to give up his life for duty's sake should have to sail under orders not known to him. Yet the officer takes it as an honour that he is presumed ready to obey his superior implicitly.

Now God deals with us all by sealed orders. When a sinner is saved his first question is " What shall I do ? " He must take a leap in the dark. You cannot see the excellency of Christ till you have believed. You cannot know the beauty of the Father's home until you enter in. No man was worthier than Paul to ask that every step should be manifest beforehand, but he is brought low, dazzled, blinded, humbled, abased. The command is " Go into the city," into Damascus, led by the hand, like a little child. The road to salvation often lies in ordinary commonplace duty. Go to the church, to the prayer-meeting, read, pray. You say, But I have done all that already. Go again.

They say nothing annoys soldiers more than marching and counter-marching and then discovering their leader has no plan. God does not deal with us as one who keeps us hanging on, waiting for an opening. No, the longer the orders are kept sealed the longer so to speak we are kept in commission. There is something further for us to do.

THE SIN OF FEAR

MARK VI. 52. PSALM III. 5-8.

" For their heart was hardened."

THE disciples' terror was direct disobedience to God. It arose out of hardness of heart. There is no command given so often as " Fear not." Sin brought fear. " I was afraid," said Adam. James tells us, as if he had often heard his Lord speak of it, that " the devils believe, and tremble." Fear is an attribute of theirs. There are kinds of fear that are right, such a fear as our Lord is said in Hebrews to have had. " He was heard for his godly fear " ; His reverence ; or such a fear as He had when He looked upon sin and when He saw the wrath of God coming ; but the ordinary fear that you and I have in time of trouble is absolutely forbidden. Search the Scriptures and you find that command, " Fear not," given to every one of God's great saints, and we see that that command had a reason behind it. When He spoke to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to Moses and to Joshua, saying " Fear not," we see now that if anything had happened to them the whole of God's purpose would have been overturned. And so here. We cannot imagine our Lord perishing in the waters, and it is just as inconceivable that the twelve apostles who were to carry on His work should perish. They did not know, of course,

how much depended on them—neither do we, but God was their God and is ours. They were men of experience, thoughtful, rational men, yet here we read "they considered not the loaves"—the things that had happened but a few hours before. That miracle had revealed Christ's compassion, His love, His tenderness, His power, His joy in God, His concern for even the bodies of His creatures, His delight in their comfort, His care for their souls, His Divine command to them—they did not consider all that, and it is put down, not to the excitement of the day, nor to the weariness of the night's rowing, but to their hardness of heart.

So when we lose heart and are filled with fear, it is sin that lies at the door. It is not a defective element in our nature; nor is it a great sense of eternal things; if we had that, we should give up sin this very moment. Our fear of death is the result of love of sin. If we came honestly to Christ, if we sought Him with all our hearts, there never would be wanting the memory of past mercies, and the consolation of the promises. The most elementary perception of the nature of God's relationship to us would make us feel that there was work to be done, that there must be twelve hours in each saint's day, that the powers of hell are helpless, that an unheard-of difficulty is just a new loving manifestation of God—God coming in an unlooked-for way.

GRACE AMID JUDGMENT

2 KINGS VII. 9. PSALM LXVIII. 11-12.

"Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace."

How completely God's love is illustrated in this story! The trouble of the people in Samaria was entirely the result of sin. Their deliverance from trouble was entirely the result of free grace. There was no repentance, no cry for mercy. There was only the practice of new forms of wickedness, the surrender of all human feeling—a woman boiling her child; there was rage against God; there were threats against His servant Elisha, one of the greatest of the prophets; and there was laughter when deliverance was promised. Yet God helps them. He is vexed to see men in such distress. Every day we find people covered by His feathers—even ungodly people. Stranger still, He shields them. He does not glory in exposing their sin; He remembers their frailty. What must be the sinner's state when God finally refuses to be gracious to him?

There was grace in the way deliverance came: from what seemed an impossible quarter. Yet just what we might expect, for God is infinite in wisdom.

There was grace toward the enemy. God had to vindicate His own justice. The people of Samaria

deserved His wrath, and had He granted them victory in battle they would have been uplifted with pride. They would have said their own arm had saved them, and God's name would have suffered. The heathen would have said He favoured His own nation whether they were in the right or in the wrong.

And there was grace in the way the message came. We should have expected it to come by the mouth of a sentinel, or by one of the King's princes. And in ordinary circumstances it would have been so, but from beginning to end of this story there is not the opportunity for pride, and no honour to anyone but God.

And there was grace to the poor lepers. Lepers hitherto in Israel had been looked upon as an offence. Their touch was contagion. They could not work, they were forced to beg, and so their suffering in all its loathsomeness was obtruded on the public gaze. In the providence of God the good news is first made known to them. There is a use for lepers after all! They can penetrate where no other can. The people of Samaria from that hour would learn to treat them more tenderly. Many a time it had been thought it were best for a leper to die—they were dead to all use. Even so it is where sin abounded that grace is made more to abound. Those who have been in the deep pit and the miry clay know the depths of misery and the malice of Satan. They bring a new hope; they sing a new song; they give us courage; they have got first-hand knowledge; they can ask others to come and see for themselves.

HIMSELF HE CANNOT SAVE

MATT. XXVII. 42. PSALM XXII. 7-8.

"If He be the king of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross."

IT looks at first as if that were a fair offer. Surely Christ wanted them to believe. And when they told Him they would believe if He came down from the cross, why did He not do it?

They were not speaking the truth. They would *not* have believed. They were not honest men. They hated Him without a cause. He reproved them and that was why they hated Him. He had done nothing but good. They said that He had a devil and was mad; that it was by Beelzebub He cast out devils. But suppose they had been honest in saying all that, their whole conduct in apprehending Him was shameless in the extreme. They sought false witnesses, offered money for them, and pretended to Pilate that Christ wished to be a king in opposition to Cæsar, and that they had no king but Cæsar. Look at their conduct at the cross. These men were the chief men of Israel and they knew these heathen soldiers were watching them and taking notice how they behaved in the presence of death. Here were three men in fearful agony, all nailed to crosses. They had not one word of pity, or advice, or comfort for the two thieves.

And as for Christ, they gloated over His sufferings; they wagged their heads and jeered at Him. After His death, He rose, and *that* was a more wonderful thing than coming down from the cross. When Roman soldiers fled and told them about the angels at the tomb, did they believe? A Roman soldier leaving a post which he had to guard was a thing unknown, yet the Pharisees bribed them to hold their tongue and say nothing. Forty days Christ was on earth, and if they had gone to the disciples and said "Is it true He is risen? May we see Him?" He would have shown Himself. If our Lord had come down from the cross they would have said, "This is another of Satan's tricks which we cannot understand."

They could not have believed Christ if He had come down from the cross, for He had said time after time to them, as we know from what they said to Pilate, that He was to die and rise the third day.

If Christ had come down from the cross He would not have been the Christ, for it behoved Him to suffer. He was the Lamb of God, and without shedding of blood, *His* blood, there could be no remission of sin. "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a a stumbling block and unto the Gentiles foolishness, but unto them which are called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. And God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Jesus Christ."

WHY THE GOSPELS ARE FOUR

MARK I. 1. PSALM XL 7-10.

"The Gospel of Jesus Christ."

WHY were there four Gospels written instead of one? The answer is very simple. God in His sovereign grace might perfectly well have given us in His own direct words an account of the life of Christ. He might have done without human instrumentality at all. He might have written upon tables of stone the story of the Gospel, as He did the Commandments at Mount Sinai. But God never does anything Himself that He can get us to do. He wants us to be partakers of His glory. Remember the Gospels were all inspired, but there are different ways of inspiration. God might have told Mark to take his pen and "write as follows." If He had done so, the Gospels would all have been in the same style. The four evangelists wrote under the guidance of God's Spirit. He brought things to their remembrance, suggested things to them, and above all watched them while they wrote, so that every word is God's word.

How differently they begin! Matthew begins with the generation of Jesus Christ, and then he tells the story of our Saviour's birth and descent. Luke, again, tells us about the birth of John the Baptist, and our Saviour's birth and upbringing, tells us of the songs of

their parents, the song of the angels, the song of Simeon, and of our Saviour's boyhood. Mark begins at once with Isaiah's prophecy and the fulfilment of it in John, and immediately enters on our Saviour's public ministry. And need I remind you how John, the greatest of the four, enters on his work? He neither goes back to Isaiah like Mark, nor to Abraham like Matthew, but at once, with words that carry us beyond all time and take us into eternity—into the very counsels of God, he says, "In the beginning was the Word."

Why did God use, not only men, but different types of men? It was because there were different kinds of men to be spoken to. So Matthew wrote for the Jews. He is always quoting the Old Testament Scriptures. He dwells on the Messiah promised to the fathers. Luke points Christ out as the Son of Man, Son of Adam, the Good Physician, who went about continually doing good. He wrote for scholars and for Gentiles. Mark, again, tells us He is the Son of God mighty to save, and in His gospel we find Christ coming forth conquering and to conquer. There is the word constantly occurring—"straightway," "immediately," telling of the Divine energy, never resting, every hour filled up, filled up with infinite, Godlike power and majesty and sympathy. And then John rises above them all, showing the *God-Man;* at one moment saying, "All power is given to Me"; and the next washing the disciples' feet.

THE LESSON OF JOSEPH'S COFFIN

GENESIS L. 26. PSALM CII. 26-28.

"He was put in a coffin in Egypt."

THAT is the end of Joseph and all his greatness—of him who used to ride in the second chariot, before whom they cried "Bow the knee!"—with the gold chain and the fine linen, ruler over all the land of Egypt. Now he lies in the narrow house; and eighty years had passed since he stood before Pharaoh; ninety-three years since Joseph had been appointed for death by his brethren. For more than twenty years Jacob mourned for him.

What a strange history it was! The boy put into a pit to die; then lifted out and sold as a slave; thrown into the prison-house as a malefactor; and at last the motherless lad becomes the Prime Minister of Egypt. The coat of many colours had been the symbol of his chequered life. You children who are at school, perhaps get up dux for knowing the name of a town on the map, and you are glad you know it. Thirty years after this you may walk through its streets labouring and heavy laden; perchance you may lie down in its hospital to die. You look at a ship and wish you were at sea. You would choose "a life on the ocean wave," and that ocean may be the place of your burial. Wherever you go, take God with you.

The end is death, but in His care the middle of the way and all the way is love.

Joseph died full of faith, giving commandment concerning his bones. "God will surely visit you." He claims even when dead to have a right to the good land.

But a king arose who knew not Joseph. And four hundred years pass! There is no such gap in all the Bible after this, not even at the close of the Old Testament. It looked as if all were forgotten. Is there not a strange contrast between the first words and the last in this book of Genesis? "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"—what a vast empire! "He was put in a coffin in Egypt"—what a narrow house! Ay, and worse, there is corruption in death. Yet the Lord who made the heavens watched over that coffin and that dust. And in the book of Exodus we read of a babe lying in a cradle of rushes on the waters of the Nile—a babe condemned to death, but wondrously saved to be the leader who was to bring the Children of Israel out of the land of bondage. And on the night of their deliverance "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him," and they were borne through all the desert wanderings and at last rested in the parcel of ground which Jacob had purchased from the children of Hamor. God had honoured Joseph's faith.

FALSELY TRUE

MARK VI. 26. PSALM LXXIII. 6-9.

" For his oath's sake."

HEROD would pride himself on being a man of his word, kind-hearted and obliging, the very soul of honour. These are the arguments with which Satan has deluded people in all ages.

It is evident that a trap had been laid for Herod. The dancing of Salome was not the happy innocent dance of a merry girl, nor even the stately stepping of a court lady, but such dancing as the Romans themselves called shameful, such an exhibition as roused all that was base in men and made them for the moment slaves to their passions, dethroning reason and preventing thought and reflection.

The word " oaths " is in the plural. That shows us the empty boastings, the repeated asseverations, of a man who has forgotten the grace of brevity, who has forgotten how weighty a king's word should be.

His oaths! What oaths? Those made a few moments before when his blood was hot? His oath, taken literally, could not bind him to what was simply impossible. Had he forgotten the oaths he took as king, especially as king under the Romans, to whom law was the strongest possible idea? No oaths to his subjects? None to his wife to love her and honour

her, and save her from herself if need be? Every royal decree he signed, had it not some reference to the honour of kings? Were there no promises made to John the Baptist when he heard him gladly and did many things? Did not the very idea of a feast pledge him to act the part of a noble host? Were there no vows made in time of trouble, in time of fear, when he watched John carefully, in those moments when the Holy Ghost strove with him? No vows even to Herodias herself about John—"I will not interfere with him"? He would keep one oath, but trample on a hundred.

As a king his first right was to do justice, to love mercy, to protect the innocent, to save life.

He was a husband and father and by granting this request he laid bare, he brought into open day, the shameful secret of his marriage. Were all his duties owing only to those "that sat at meat with him"? That saying might itself have saved him. Was it their ridicule? their wild laughter? For the sake of the men—not for the sake of what is base in the men. That argument tells all the other way.

Do not say you do this thing or that thing because you are good-natured and do not like to say "no." Do not bring in the name of freedom in your argument, or courage, or oaths, or good fellowship. Tell the truth, and if you will go to perdition, go like an honest man and say, "I love drink, I love vice, and I do not care for any man's soul." Do not go down with a lie in your right hand.

LIVING WATER

JOHN IV. 7. PSALM XXXVI. 8.

" Jesus saith unto her, Give Me to drink."

THESE words bring before us our Saviour's humiliation. He was wearied and thirsty. He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet God manifest in the flesh. He knew what was in man because He *was* man.

One would hardly have expected such a sentence as this, and yet nothing should make us happier. We have no need to be ashamed of any want, no need to feel as if we were troubling the Master. He knows.

We also see His perfect subjection to the law in that He had to submit to the ordinary guidance of providence. Our Saviour was of course conscious of the work that was before Him. He knew there was an hour coming and that His time was short. Should we not have expected God to deliver Him from all the petty annoyances of life? Yet He went through life hampered by cares just like ourselves and led by Divine guidance.

He sat " thus " on the well. It is a very human touch. He was weary and thirsty. In ordinary circumstances doubtless He would have gone with His disciples, but He was evidently too tired and was led by chance to sit thus—as we should say. We do not

see the Divine guidance because we do not look for it. No doubt we should have wondered at the Eternal God manifest in flesh sitting on that well doing nothing, and so much to be done. But we see God was guiding Him. It was twelve o'clock in the day, the one hour when there was no chance of a passer-by. Yet in the providence of God a woman came to the well.

We see our Saviour's love. She was a woman then living in sin, with a strange sad history, and she needed help. Jesus begins by putting a request, as it were, giving her a chance of making Him indebted to her. No ordinary Jew would have done it. Jews have no dealings with Samaritans, but God has. And His dealings are not meant simply to be ordinary ones. Above all things let us learn that lesson, that if God has any dealings with us they are meant to be dealings of the highest kind. If we have a chance of helping a soul, such as giving a cup of water, pointing the way, thanking any for kindness, bearing patiently and forgiving wrong, we are dealing directly with God. We say, I wonder why that person spoke to me. Why did he ask me to point the way, and thank me? Christ instantly answers, "I wanted you to ask something of Me." Could you imagine grace more free? The fact that God or any person on earth has asked a favour is a proof that God wants us to ask the same of Him, only multiplied infinitely.

LOST YEARS RESTORED

JOEL II. 25. PSALM XXXIX. 4-5.

"And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten."

WE have here something lost, and that something very precious. The men of Judah were to labour—to plough their fields, to sow, to watch, and just when all was ready to be gathered in they were to see their fruits consumed before their eyes. The year's labours and the year's hopes were to perish in a day, and to perish in a way peculiarly humiliating. One does not object to a loss if it occurs in a grand or heroic way. If the fruits of a country were destroyed by the fire of an enemy, or even by the lightning of God, one could bear that, but to see locusts, caterpillars, cankerworms—that adds bitterness—an army every member of which is contemptible, yet so formidable, so invincible, so victorious, as a whole, marching on, conquering and to conquer. Yet God often does that. "He poureth contempt upon princes" (Psalm cvii. 40).

The value of one day in the sight of God is set forth in this—that the crowning proofs of man's sin and God's love were all accomplished in less than twenty-four hours. The greatest love, the greatest suffering, the greatest mercy, all came in one hour. But it is not moments or days that we have lost. As an actual

fact we have lost years. Even in our best years we feel that in idling, putting off, looking for things out of their places, deliberate squandering of time, putting the time in, which means putting the time away, we lose a large part of life. We have minds that are capable of working the works of God, minds that in an instant can be in union with the Divine, and these minds are left idle, or busy with lying vanities. Are there not huge gaps in our lives—whole years that have passed away and left no mark ?

Yet herein are the love and power of God made manifest. The years *are* restored. The locusts are His great army, guided, controlled, made to carry out His decree. We see it in John's Gospel. Men's doubt, their timidity, their ignorance, were made to point out and work out the glory of Christ. The years are not lost for God. His purposes do not suffer. That shall be revealed hereafter fully.

But they are restored to us also. Where sin abounded grace is made more to abound. We may ennoble the past by a vast regret. " Rend your heart, and turn unto the Lord." We get them back through penitence. By taking hold of our sins and casting them on Christ we are clothed in His righteousness. We are *redeemed*, bought back, with everything belonging to us. Christ is seen in all our past life. There is not simply a vast gap, to be left unfilled ; it is filled with that love whose depth and height pass knowledge.

THE SUPPLANTER

GENESIS XXV. 31. PSALM CVI. 4-5.

"And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright."

THERE was no need to pay such a price for food. There was bread enough and to spare in the father's house; no need for the elder son to perish with hunger in the tent that was Isaac's, the greatest of men in the East. But supposing there had been no alternative but sell the birthright or starve, how well for Esau if he had said, like Christ, tempted in the same way, "Man shall not live by bread alone." Even suppose death had been the result, dying for his birthright Esau would have kept his birthright—the greatest right a man can have, the greatest right a son of God can have—the right the only begotten Son of God did have—the right to die rather than do wrong, the right to give up life rather than to give up God.

For that was the meaning of the birthright. The whole world's destinies were bound up in God's promises to Abraham, the promises on which all other promises were hanging. It meant being God's witness in the world, being the father of the chosen race, of whom as concerning the flesh the very Son of God was to come, the world's Hope and the world's Redeemer. And because Christ was included in that inheritance, all else was included, all that has been done in the

name of the Holy Child Jesus, all that shall be done, the whole eternal purpose and plan of God.

Esau went on in wickedness, lamenting his loss but never repenting of his sin. "I will kill my brother Jacob." Having lost the birthright, he recked little though all the world should lose it. He would overwhelm all in his own destruction.

We cannot be too hard on Esau, but we should not forget the younger brother's wickedness. It is no excuse to say he valued the birthright—no excuse for a thief to say the pearl he stole was a pearl of great price. To have saved the heir, to have kept his brother from sin, would have been itself an honour, but to glory in his brother's shame, what a crime it was! And how much it cost Jacob!

What is your birthright, you who are young? Is it not to do all you can for God, to lose no promise held out to you, to make the very best of life for yourselves and others? Will you fling it away for less than a mess of pottage, for a cup of shame, for a cup of devils? And as there are no young here who are not tempted to sell their birthright, are there not others who put temptation in their way? There may be Jacobs here as well as Esaus. Is there no master here who has made his servant tell a lie to gain a shilling? No mother who for nothing but a foolish fear has made her child participate in falsehood? The man who makes gain by another's loss, the man who takes the drunkard's money and the drunkard's character acts as Jacob did.

LOVE'S OFFERING

MARK XIV. 3. PSALM CXVI. 12-14.

" An alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious."

WE are told of a woman coming to our Lord as He sat at meat and pouring upon His head most precious ointment. It was Christ's last happy meal in mixed company. It was in the house of Simon the leper, the house of one once cast out from the people of God, and now he entertains the Lord of Glory Himself. And Lazarus was there who had lain in the grave, and Martha and Mary. It is very beautiful to see how true they are to their old character, only how greatly improved. " Martha served." Once she had come grumbling to Christ about her sister, and He had lovingly reproved her. " Thou art troubled about many things." Many a one after that would have served no more. It is a common fault that, when spoken to, a person flies off to the other extreme. It is a mark of the child of God that he gives up just what was wrong.

Martha served, and when they sat at meat Mary, who seems to have been both sitting and serving, could sit no longer. She loved Christ ; she must do something to show her love ; there was that box of ointment ; what was it for, if not to pour on Him ? And so she brake it, brake it completely, emptied it,

anointed His head and His weary feet and wiped them with her glory, the hair of her head.

So I trust it was with you last Sabbath as you sat at the Table of the Lord. Your hearts were touched by His love. He was actually sitting at meat with you. Perhaps there was with you a Lazarus raised from the dead, a Simon healed of his leprosy; there was a joy and peace about your lot you never expected on earth, and you broke your heart over Him. It was too full for utterance, you did not know what to do, but you loved Him and wondered at His grace.

There was a dark side to that scene in Bethany. Judas stirred up the disciples to envy and anger. Mary's love and devotion seemed preposterous, utterly foolish. That is a sad thing—that we grow either better or worse. It is savour of life unto life or of death unto death. Mary wins an immortal crown. Judas sinks into hopeless infamy. I hope many of you as you sat with Christ won such a crown—a crown never fading. "A broken and a contrite heart," for that is the ointment, the ointment of joy and gladness and love, the ointment of devotion to God, the sweet savour of prayer that fills heaven, that forces itself on the notice and memory of God. I trust you know what it is, as it were, to weep with joy. Another may call it foolish, unmeaning, a waste of tears, a waste of words, a waste of energy, but God knows you did what you could. You loved Him well.

CHRIST'S CUP AND OURS

MARK X. 38-39. PSALM CXVI. 13-19.

"Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? And they said unto Him, We can."

WE feel angry when we read the request of Salome and her two sons. It seemed to be the height of selfishness and pride. And we do not wonder at the indignation of the other disciples. They must have seen a peculiar meanness in it, for every one of them had coveted the highest position and thought himself worthy of it. Now James and John had stolen a march on them. It could not be denied that they had strong claims. They were, it is believed, relations of our Lord's by birth, they were in the inner circle of His friendship, and their mother had been one of those ever-blessed women who had followed Christ, ministering to Him of their substance. They had brought her to Christ to settle for ever in their favour the controversy that each one had thought to settle for himself by superior ability when the hour should come. None of the other disciples were in the position to bring the irresistible pleading of a woman to their cause. But Christ's ways are not our ways. There was pride, selfishness, and envy in that request, but there was faith, and there was love, and Christ felt the love through it all and drew forth that love by putting such a question as He never had put to man before.

The question and answer describe in perfection the oneness of Christ and the believer. There are two cups Christ has had to drink, and we too have to drink if we are His—the cup of God's wrath and the cup of His love. When God visited upon Christ the iniquity of us all—a cup as bitter as God could make it, as bitter as Christ could bear, no wonder He cried, "Father, the hour is come." That was the hour when the perfections of the Godhead were strained, if we may so say, to their very utmost. You remember the lament of God over Ephraim? "How shall I give thee up?"—the Ephraim who had given *Him* up! What must have been the agony of God when He forsook His only begotten and well-beloved Son? And what must not He have suffered who after an eternity of preparation and eager looking forward, cried out, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me?"

In one sense we cannot drink of that cup, because our Saviour drank it to the very dregs for us. But in another sense we can, when we enter into the fellowship of His sufferings by sympathy. When we feel the bitterness of our sins, the baseness of our doubts, the unkindness of our fears, when the sight of sin in others causes us real sorrow, we drink of the cup of Christ.

BRASS AS GOOD AS GOLD

EZRA VIII. 27. PSALM LXXXVII. 1-4.

" Two vessels of fine bright brass, precious as gold."

THERE is an expression in 2 Chronicles iii. 6—" And the gold was the gold of Parvaim "—from which we may learn that God dwells lovingly on His people's gifts—that He likes to look on them. We may also learn here that as there are different qualities of gold, so there are different qualities of the same grace, and we should strive to have the best. And that little text shows us that God thought of the heathen far away by whose toil His temple was enriched.

" Two vessels of fine brass, precious as gold " illustrates our Lord's parable about the talents. It is not always the man who had most to begin with who brings in the most interest. So Jeremiah speaks of the most fine gold being changed, and James goes even further, " Your gold and your silver are corrupted, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire." We have all seen many instances of that. Men with great natural endowments—gifts of speech, or song, or humour, have been the undoing of themselves and of those who came under their influence.

But our text tells of the other side—brass may become precious as gold. You know we do not get brass out of the ground. It is an alloy in certain

proportions of copper and zinc, and it possesses peculiar qualities. In an engine-room, gold would be of no use. Gold is of use where there are things needed for which it can be exchanged, but worse than useless in some emergencies. Men have been lost at sea because they were laden down with gold, while a plank of wood, a biscuit, an oar, a common knife, have been the means of saving life. A tenpenny nail in certain circumstances would be worth a kingdom.

Let us bless God that He has given us the common faculties—that they are common because most necessary. I cannot understand Newton's "Principia," but I can grasp the story of Redemption. I cannot speak with tongues, but I can pray. I cannot compete with Homer or Sophocles or Thucydides, but I can take a little child on my knee and speak about Christ.

After the bit of brass or iron has done its work it is thrown aside. Its value in a certain sense was transient, but a common thing may be made inherently and permanently valuable. Take such a common gift as the gift of writing. There is a lad, say, far away. His clever companions do not write to him because they must write a clever letter, something worthy of their reputation. But his mother, scarcely able perhaps to write at all, yearns after her boy, and writes, it may be, only a few sentences, but her whole heart is in them, and they send her son to his bunk to fall asleep with the letter under his pillow and the tears in his eyes.

CLOSER IS HE THAN BREATHING

MATT. XXVII. 51. PSALM LXXXIV. 1-3.

"The veil of the temple."

THE Temple, like the Tabernacle, was divided into three parts. There was first a large outer court, into which all Jews could go. Then there was an inner court called the Holy Place, into which only the priests could go. And behind it was the Holy of Holies, into which the High Priest alone might go, once a year, with the blood of atonement in his hand. The Holy of Holies was separated from the Holy Place by a veil or curtain. The Holy of Holies meant the dwelling place of God. The people dwelt in tents, each man had his own, God dwelt in the midst, belonging to them and sharing their wanderings; but more than that, their tents were private, His was a "tent of meeting," the one place where everyone had a right to go. The veil showed that God and His people were under one roof. God and we live in the same world, have everything to do with one another. We are as immortal as He is. We share His thoughts. His work is ours, His hopes and plans. But there is a barrier between us, because we are not yet prepared to be one with Him. Doubtless there are many of us who have never spoken to some of our neighbours and have no intention of doing so. We pass them on the street.

Yet in many ways we are beholden to each other. Is it not so with us and God? We may say nothing about Him, for or against, but He does things for us and we for Him. His sun, His rain, His summer and winter warm, feed and clothe us; and we carry on His purposes willingly or unwillingly, but we have no fellowship. The partition between us is very thin. We know what it is to go to a door and when it is being opened we hear a lock turned and a bar pulled back, or a chain taken from its socket. And the moment the door is opened it is shut and the barring and bolting go on as before. We say "Surely they wish to keep themselves to themselves!" But here we have as it were God giving part of His House to us and when we enter we find the only partition is a curtain—such a partition as the wind alone might blow open at any moment—a partition that keeps back no sound, that makes secrets impossible.

He made the curtain very beautiful, with the loveliest colours and pictures of angels. The veil between us and the other world is sometimes of entrancing beauty. We go with the dying to the brink of the river and we catch the song of the angels and the redeemed. When Christian and Hopeful passed into the Celestial City those who watched got a glimpse of the golden streets, and heard all the bells of the city ring for joy.

BOND AND FREE

PHILEMON 1. PSALM LXXXVII. 4-5.

Paul—unto Philemon.

THIS is simply a business letter, but a heavenly character pervades it all. It is a letter that reveals the love of God. It is all about a slave. A slave was little thought of long ago. He was simply a piece of goods, a being not to be believed on oath. We have often seen how God brings a sinner to Christ. Here Onesimus had run away a thousand miles from home, safe from pursuit, but God hedges his way—besets him behind and before. His master, Philemon, was a godly man, and his was the very house in which a slave might be happy. There was no driver's lash, no refuse of the wheat, no insults. Yet perhaps that was the very reason that drove Onesimus away. Doubtless his master would speak to him about his soul and he would rather have hard work and blows than come to be catechised and worship God on the Sabbath. But his wanderings did him good. In the rough treatment strangers gave him, in danger and want, things would come back to his mind—the hour of prayer, the Lord's Day, the holy lives of the Christians. The good seed had been sown and the prodigal who ran away to the far country was found by Christ. God directed his way to Paul and a runaway slave became the companion and helper of the noblest man on earth.

What honour for a sinner! How wonderfully Paul speaks of him! "My son." "Receive him *as myself*"—Paul, the man who had built up the Christian faith, the greatest Gospel orator, who had seen the Risen Christ, who had been caught up into glory, "*as myself, that is, my very heart!*" The slave had conquered Paul's affection—Onesimus was one with him.

Onesimus had been kind to Paul but unkind to Philemon. Could the old relations be restored? They could. No longer a slave, he was returning a "brother beloved." And he had the further honour of bearing an epistle to the Churches. We reverence the ship that brings good news home to us. We love those who unconsciously say something that cheers and helps us, but to be the occasion of an epistle—the means of adding a whole book to the Word of God—to be a brother beloved to the Church to the end of all time—what an honour is there!

Paul sees in little things the glory of God. A mere slave? No, a soul saved. What a short letter it is! When Philemon was asked to take back his slave, we should have expected a voluminous correspondence. Men will forgive you anything if you do not hurt their vanity, and you cannot touch a man's vanity more than by putting his difficulties in a nut-shell. Paul takes it for granted. "I know you will do it."

What persuasion God has with you and me! What sermons, tears, arguments, providences, trials, promises! And it should need only one word—one look.

ABRAHAM'S SHIELD

GENESIS XV. 1. PSALM LXXXIV. 11.

"The word of the Lord came unto Abram saying, Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield."

THIS is the first time we have the phrase, "the Word of God." The New Testament gives the meaning of that. We cannot see a person's self or soul, but we hear his word. There is a correspondence between us and our voice and our way of speech. Between God and Christ there is a perfect correspondence. Christ shows us what God is. Sometimes in a voice you recognise many qualities—firmness, honesty, kindliness; and in God's voice, and in Christ's, in every word, and in the Incarnate Word, there are all the divine attributes, there is all the fulness of God.

Abraham had much to vex him. He was lonelier than ever. Lot had gone back to Sodom. The kings of the North had been routed and after victory there is always a time of reaction. God says, "I am thy shield"; not "I will give Mine angels charge over thee," but "I, Myself, stand between thee and all danger." Abraham had got no spoils from his victory, but he had God Himself as his exceeding great reward.

Notice how God enters into Abraham's feelings—anticipates him: "Fear not." God knew how much Abraham had to fear. He knows our circumstances,

our frame, our difficulties. God takes the first word. "The Word of the Lord"—that means that we are on speaking terms with Him. He loves to overcome our difficulties. You cannot please God more than by looking all your difficulties in the face, heaping them up before Him, and then saying, "With me it is impossible, but with Thee all things are possible."

Abraham states his whole position: "I am childless, I am old. Lot has gone away from me. The nearest friend I have is my servant, this Eliezer of Damascus." (Let me say to any of you who have a good master, or mistress, it is worth while staying in a good man's house—worth while having a master that speaks to God about you at times.) Abraham is willing Eliezer should be his heir. He asks God, "What wilt Thou give me?" He had wealth, length of days, high character, and yet his soul thirsts. We feel for him as we do for one who just misses a great honour. Yet Eliezer, too, though he is not to be his heir, is in the bond of the Covenant. He comes very near to God also, and is honoured more than any servant ever was.

Then we see how God gets Abraham out of his difficulties by bringing him into a greater one. The answer to his faith was a demand for greater faith. His own son was to be his heir, and as it was impossible to tell the number of the stars so was his seed to be.

CHRIST SINGING PSALMS

MARK XIV. 26. PSALM CXVI. 17.

"And when they had sung an hymn."

THE idea of a singing God is a very strange and touching one. Where would the disciples get words in which He could join? We should not have been surprised if Christ had made them keep silence and had sung them such a song as rises from the lips of angels night and day, something like an echo from the eternal world, that would have made them cry out, "It is the voice of a God, not of a man." But even supposing He had condescended to sing a human song—one they knew—we should have expected it to be one about His kingly dignity, or His royal grace, inviting us to fall down and worship Him. But we know the very Psalms they sang—116, 117, 118. Truly we may say He was not ashamed to call us brethren. When we hear Him sing with His disciples the same words, confessing weakness, blessing God for deliverance, then there are no words to express His oneness with us. Surely He humbled Himself and made Himself of no reputation. He sang not only as an example to us, but because He was one of us; He sang because He must. He feels hurt by our sin, cast down by our sorrows, troubled by our fears.

It is a wondrous grace that when we are little we

have a memory that can pick up words and tunes very easily ; and another wondrous grace that we can have so much singing in our homes and in church. That singing prepares us for the dark hours. When we sing we take hold of God. It is well in times of peace for soldiers to march steadily to the music that is ahead of them, but when they leave for the seat of war, when they gather round the camp fires the night before a battle, it is not beautiful music they wish to hear. They wish to sing themselves. You and I go forth every week to battle. Some of us know what it is to tremble for the morrow, and when on Sabbath a psalm is given out, it is not given out at random as a mere beginning of public worship, not simply to illustrate the sermon, least of all to fill up the time , it is a song of battle, and you and I should sing, not tunes, but words and thoughts given us by the Most High God for the hour of conflict. To you who are tempted, I would say, as Martin Luther said, " Don't sit down and mope and give way to despair, but get up, and sing a psalm, and say the Lord's Prayer."

There is little doubt He will sing throughout eternity likewise. No one will have more cause to sing than He. " He shall see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied." He shall see many sons and daughters given to His Father, many brethren to Himself. Can you imagine Christ silent throughout eternity ?

SORROW TRACKETH WRONG

MARK XIV. 11. PSALM XXVI. 9-10.

"He sought how he might conveniently betray Him."

How did Judas study his convenience? He did it for his own profit. He was a thief. It is a terrible thing that such a small sin should have led to the most awful crime that was ever committed. John puts sin in three classes—the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. All sins come under a very few heads. Judas betrayed Christ for £3 10s.; if He had sold Him for an empire, it would have been the same crime. Money was what Judas loved and would have. A very little sin is sufficient to betray Christ. Do not think it takes the more shameless kind of sins—murders, adulteries, etc. The love of a stolen penny is enough.

"Conveniently." Judas had been with Christ for three years. He stole all he could out of the always small and often empty bag. Now he will make his boldest stroke—he will sell his very Master for gain. The character of Judas had never been suspected by his fellow apostles. It was Matthew's place to have kept the bag, but Judas claimed it. He seemed to be a fine leader, ever thinking of the poor. And apparently he would carry out his deception to the last. He went privately to the priests; it was to be a secret betrayal. He returned and joined at the paschal meal; professed wonder and amazement at Christ's

words ; asked, " Is it I ? " took the sop that was the symbol of friendship and honour ; ate it, and then went out into the dark. At dead of night he came back with a great multitude, with swords and staves, sent by the chief priests and the scribes and the elders —at dead of night, when he knew the disciples would be sleeping and Christ praying. The signal was to be a kiss, as if he would conceal not only from anyone who should be awake but even from God Himself his awful purpose.

And the result ? Christ meets him plainly and reveals that purpose in the hearing of the disciples. His character is lost with them now, and with the world, too. For after the betrayal, when Christ was condemned, he burst into the midst of the chief priests and elders, dashed down the pieces of silver, confessed himself a traitor, and went and hanged himself. And that deed which he thought no one would know, becomes one of the central and best known deeds of all eternity.

Some of us may be seeking opportunity conveniently to sin. If there be anything you have set your heart on that you cannot tell the world, I pray you, come to Christ now and beg Him to cleanse you from secret faults. If not cleansed, they will become presumptuous. There is no such thing as sinning conveniently —or profitably—no slightest chance of the very slightest gain, but the certainty of exposure and shame and agony, not only in eternity, which you may think far off, but even now, long before you leave this world.

JESUS THE NAZARENE

MARK XVI. 6. PSALM XXII. 7-8.

"Be not affrighted: ye seek Jesus of Nazareth."

"BE not affrighted: ye seek Jesus of Nazareth." Why is that the name the angel applied to the Risen Son of God? When He was born angels sang—"A Saviour, which is Christ the Lord!" It was only a little while since they had seen His spirit enter Paradise. They had seen the rapture with which He had been received into the bosom of the Father. They had heard and seen all the acclamations of the redeemed and the homage of angels. There had been such triumphing and rejoicing as there never had been since angels were created or the foundations of heaven established and its kingdom opened to all believers. In that hour the angels themselves had got a perfect glimpse into the Being and Character of God, and one would have expected them to come with such singing as should have made the birth-night at Bethlehem be forgotten. Their natural instinct would surely have been to fly through the world proclaiming the glad tidings, but God forbade them and they obeyed.

It was the name of His humiliation and patience. Nazareth was a wicked place. "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" A place that needed Christ. To the angels it was a reminder of that marvel of grace. They watched over Him when He was subject to His parents and made a little lower than the angels.

They ministered to Him, strengthened Him. What a curious position to be in—to have charge concerning Him!

It was the name of contempt, hostility, obscurity, and of ordinary common trial. If any of you are like Him, misunderstood, kept down by those who know less than you, not appreciated, daily burdened—then rejoice *in that name.*

The devils gave it to Him by way of insult. I do not suppose they fully understood the mystery of His birth—but they, too, had been watching Him, puzzled, baffled, hating Him, and in constant terror. "What have we to do with Thee?"

It was the name on the cross—His *accusation* written—the whole story of His humiliation, the whole story of His glory and His love. As it were, the angels cannot keep their eyes away from the cross. It was a *new* name to them; so rich, so full!

It was the name used by His friends—His common name, but also His official name. "Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in word and in deed." What an element of sorrow there was in these words. "We trusted"—now only Jesus of Nazareth—nothing more. So also the angel named Him to the weeping women on that cold, grey morn. The two disciples and the angel thus used the same name, but with so different a meaning!

It is His own name for Himself. He appeared to Paul, saying, "I am Jesus of Nazareth"—a name which had been odious to Paul—maddening, contemptible, but was to become the name above every name.

A SINFUL WOMAN'S FAITH

HEBREW XI. 31. PSALM XL. 4.

"By faith—Rahab."

THE first person Joshua met after crossing the Jordan was his great Namesake. It was Christ welcoming His people to the land in which 1,400 years after He was to die. And the first woman—and indeed the first person named of all the inhabitants of the land—was one from whom Christ was to be descended. Christ claimed the first-fruits of the conquest of Canaan. Do you think it hard that all the spoil of Jericho was to be God's? Remember it went to the priests who were the teachers and servants of the people. If the private history of us all were known it might be found out that Christ has the first-fruits in all our lives. Whenever you go to a new situation, or a new home, when you form a new friendship—a new anything, ask Christ to take it, and you are as much a gainer as He.

We see here a sinner saved—one who might well have been called a hopeless case, yet she was a woman with father and mother and sisters and brethren, one who had every earthly inducement to do well. She had heard of the power of God, and the terror of the Lord persuaded her. We have all wondered about Rahab telling lies. God is a God of truth, but

also of mercy. Perhaps the sin of untruthfulness had never been revealed to her. What should we have done? Have we not all told lies when suddenly caught? What ought she to have done? She should have refused to answer any questions and just left the matter in God's hands. As it was, she really took a most dangerous course. God could have kept the men from searching. Our judgment, our eyes, are all in His hands. But suppose they had been discovered? And put to death? Well, be it so. She would have died a blessed martyr. But God had chosen her from all eternity. He had brought the spies to her house. It is the same God who keeps our goings out and in, who directs us what town to go to, and what street, who numbers all our steps.

We see here what a godly lodger can do. Had the spies been bad men, or even ordinary men, who made light of sin, even although they kept from it, Rahab's heart would have been hardened against God. But they were men who showed in all they did that they were different from others.

Ah! but how much faith remained! The spies gone—suppose they forget all about their promise in the confusion of a siege and an assault—her life hanging literally by a thread? The God that had done so much would do the rest.

LIGHT AT EVENING TIME

3 JOHN v. 7. PSALM LXXI. 18.

"For His Name's sake."

WE can see here an old man's joys. Christ is everything to him. Yet John's joys are not in the past. There is no word of regret for the old days when he companied with his brother James and Peter and leaned his head upon his Lord's breast. If ever man might have spoken regretfully and indulged in memories, only thinking of the past, it was he. But he has a rich, happy life. The man who had such a Master, such a friend, such a brother, such a mother of his own, and such a woman as the mother of his Lord was to care for, still finds people worthy to be loved. There is Gaius, a Gentile convert, to whom every Christian is a brother and every stranger that loves the Lord a friend. John seems to be surrounded by brethren. He is one of those who seek good and find it, to whom the world is a place in which God's glory is made manifest. He rejoices that there are children walking in the truth—a generation of men and women whose hearts are right with God. The spreading of the Gospel fills his heart with joy. There are men journeying who deserve to be treated worthily—men with more than the old faith, men who never saw the Lord, yet have believed—men of the Gentiles,

who have left all for Christ, making Christ's glory their aim and Christ's promises their staff.

But we can see also an old man's trials. Cato, when 86, speaks bitterly of having to make his defence to a generation that did not know him. If ingratitude were ever hard to bear it was in such a case as John's. Some there were who doubted Paul's claim to apostleship : he had been a persecutor ; he never saw Christ in the flesh. But John was *the* man who knew the Lord, the disciple whom He loved, one who was with Him on the Mount, who sat closest to Him at supper, who was alone with Him at the cross, and filled His place on earth after He was set down upon His throne. He had served Christ for more than three score years, had faced death and persecution, and yet saw his authority derided, his commands disobeyed, and the missionaries of the Gospel refused a lodging and an entrance to the Church.

At the close of the letter we see the old man's hope. He hopes to see his well-beloved Gaius face to face and to speak to him of the multitude of things about which he feels too tired to write to him. John longs for a personal meeting, and if it did not take place on earth it did in heaven. And as John hoped to see Gaius, so he hopes to see you and me also face to face.

A MISUNDERSTOOD TESTIMONIAL

1 Samuel xiii. 14. Psalm li. 1-4.

"A man after God's own heart."

Ungodly, foolish men point to David and all his crimes—his murder, his adultery, his treachery, the weakness of his old age, and say, That's an Old Testament saint! That's the man who gets to heaven, and people who have never sinned as he did are to be cast away! Even God's own people are troubled, and ask, Was there no better man than David in all the Bible? Is he to be picked out as the one person to whom God could point and say, "That is the kind of man I like." Now, those who make a mock of God and David are quite wrong in their use of the passage. They lay hold of one particular part of David's life—his murder and adultery—and say, with a sneer, That is the man after God's own heart! God does not say this of David after the murder of Uriah. He says it years before, and only of David in comparison with Saul. The children of Israel had wanted a king. They insulted Samuel, the man who had served them through a long life since childhood. They wanted a king who would lead them out to battle like other nations and God gave them exactly what they wanted. Saul was a kingly-looking man, but as ignorant a man as could be found, a man incapable of learning or of obeying a plain command, a man perverse and unspiritual. Compare Saul with David. David, too,

was born in a lowly position. He kept his father's sheep. Brave to a fault, he slew the lion and the bear. He came to the field of battle, anxious for his country. Hearing the taunts of the giant Philistine, he was amazed that no Israelite would fight for God and fatherland, and with humble faith and magnificent courage he fought and killed Goliath. Ungodly people have no right to fix on one part of David's life and say, This is the man after God's own heart. We should remember God makes no attempt to hide David's sin. Not only does God tell us of it, but He tells us what no other knew. Had it not been for revelation, we never could have known the depths of that sin.

God's own people have often made light of David's sin, or rather, have spoken of it as if it were less than another's. It was greater than another's. If works make a man like God, no man was ever further off from Heaven than David. We must remember that his sin was punished as that sin deserved. I suppose death was its just reward. He escaped that—but only to suffer worse than death.

What makes David a man after God's own heart is—he confessed his sin frankly and cast himself on the Divine mercy. Saul never seems to have seen the harm he did. He weeps and asks to be honoured before the people. He says, "I have sinned," and then goes and commits the same sin over again—year after year.

Yes, we should praise God above all things that the man after His own heart is *the sinner that repents*. That is the man over whom there is joy in heaven.

MATTHEW'S JOYFUL SURRENDER

MARK II. 14. PSALM CXIX. 133.

"As He passed by."

JESUS was "passing by," and saw Levi. Does that mean that He just happened to see Levi, and the idea occurred to Him then and there to speak to him? We talk a great deal about chance meetings, but Jesus' "passing by" is no chance.

In ordinary circumstances when we speak of a man passing by we think of him as having an object in view. And so Christ had, but He was there also for everyone that will detain him. It looks so simple. "He passed by," but that meeting was arranged from all eternity, and the hour had come. The same thing would hold good of you and me if we only believed. There is no record of a man being kept idle by God, who wanted to work. Do we accomplish anything in "passing by"? Are we growing in thoughtfulness, preparing ourselves for any emergency that may come? As others watch us on our daily rounds, can they say, "Surely this is a man of God that passeth by"?

Levi collected the taxes for the Roman Government. The tax-gatherers were, of course, very unpopular. They put on very much what taxes they pleased, as they do in the East to this day. They had the meanness which is produced by constant grasping for

money. Hence the Jewish doctors thought it no harm to break their word to them, for they regarded them as murderers or thieves. That was the kind of man our Saviour here called, for this was His glory, that He came to call sinners.

"He rose up and left all." To take such a step means a very great deal of decision. No man likes to own that his whole life has been a complete mistake. It involves parting company with his old friends, and it takes a long time to make new ones. The world will try him to find out if he is in earnest. If Christ had offered Matthew a better income than he had, it would have been no trial. We are all willing to give up if we get so much in return. We are all willing to give up our bad temper provided people will yield to us. Matthew left all at once, and did it joyfully.

Then he made a great feast. In his own account of this there is a very beautiful modesty. He simply says, "As He sat at meat in the house." But another Evangelist, Luke, says, "Levi made Him a great feast in his house." It is hard to give up sin, harder still to give it up joyfully, but there is no doubt of this, there is no joy in the world like the joy of abandoning a sin you love, no matter what it may cost you. If ever there is a day when we should make a feast, it is that day.

CHRIST PRAYING IN GETHSEMANE

MATTHEW XXVI. 36. PSALM XIII.

" Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder."

THESE words show us the exceeding depth of our Saviour's sorrow. We all know how hard it is to tell our inmost thoughts even to our dearest friends. There are many things we would not and could not speak of, and one of those things is our present relation towards God. It is easy to go back on past experiences but it is not easy to tell of our present state, and indeed it would not as a rule be wise to do so. There are some chambers where God alone has a right to come, and one of these is the place of secret prayer. When we were little we prayed at our father's or mother's knee, and the reason was, they knew better than ourselves what we needed to pray for ; but when we grow up we pray alone. We know what we want, and though we cannot conceal the fact that we are going to pray or have been praying, yet the longer we live there is the greater unwillingness to show that. It is one of the signs of the unhappiness of our civilisation that so many people should live in houses where there is no possibility of being alone. It would take a great effort for any of us to say to another, " Sit you here while I go and pray yonder." A man is in great distress before he can say that. Perhaps some

of you may remember the struggle you had with yourselves before you could ask a minister or elder to pray for you. Our Saviour Himself told us to enter into our chamber and shut the door, and inasmuch as He had no door to shut He used to pray on the mountains. Many a time the disciples knew what He was doing up there. He could not help that, but now for the first time He told them what He was going to do.

He prayed alone, but He wanted to have them near Him. He knew the value of human friendship, and yet those three men, Peter, James and John, the best Christ could have, could only sit while He prayed. His was a sorrow that could not be explained—they did not know what it meant.

These words, "Sit ye here while I go and pray yonder," still describe our Saviour's work. We are in this world and He prays yonder, in Heaven. He now makes intercession for us with full knowledge of our case, with sympathy, and unceasingly.

You and I would like to have seen Christ praying in the garden. Why, we too might have slept! But now we may not only sit here while He prays—we may join with Him in prayer and intercession.

THE IMMEASURABLE LOVE OF GOD

JOHN III. 16. PSALM LXXVIII. 68.

"So loved."

THE sentence in the Greek Testament begins with "So." If it is true that a man's taste is known by his adjectives, and his judgment by his conjunctions, one may say that his life is known by his verbs and adverbs. "So" here qualifies "loved." "The love of God for sinners was such that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." This is our Lord's account of Himself and His Father. That, He says, is how God loved. It was the first great chance Christ had, so to speak, of telling the whole secret of God, the whole history of eternity. People often wonder why it was left chiefly to Paul to unfold the nature of redemption. Our Saviour in His earthly life had two specially great trials—the sin of bad men and the slowness of His disciples to understand. His whole life was a mystery which His disciples could not understand—which they even could not avoid misunderstanding. There were great moments of faith—as when the woman touched the hem of His garment; when Bartimæus, the blind beggar, stopped Him; when men opened the roof; when the Syrophenician woman said, "The dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table"; when a sinner kissed His feet; when Peter said, "Thou art

the Christ, the Son of the Living God." But He was never once fully understood. Men and women saw that He was good and tender and wise and mighty. They saw He was the Son of God, but they could not look at His glory—the crown, the very essence, the end, the purpose, the reason, why He did these things. It must have grieved Him beyond words. We make the same mistake yet when we fix on His miracles as the crowning proof of His sonship and Divine Nature. The proof of His Divinity is that He was willing and able to bear the wrath of God. *Willing and able.* "Father, into Thy hands," He cried as He died, "I commend My spirit," though He had no sign that His Father's hands were stretched out to receive His spirit.

Did this love cost God anything? He *gave* His only begotten Son, and there never was such giving. He gave Him up to all natural sinless infirmities—to hunger, sleep, weariness: to temptations, to the world's hatred, to the world's slander, malice, cruelty. Most wonderful of all, He gave Him up to His own wrath. It was the most solemn deliberate act.

And what was the object of it all? That we might have eternal life—life in its fullest, like Christ's life and God's own.

And the terms on our part are the simplest—humble acceptance—at once the easiest way and the most profound way, so worthy, so ennobling. There is no exception, no proviso, nothing kept back: "Whosoever believeth on Him"—anyone and everyone is welcome to everlasting life. "God *so* loved." "So." There is nothing awanting.

CHRIST DRIVEN AWAY

MARK VIII. 13. PSALM LXXXI. 11-13.

"And He left them."

WHEN we read this verse, we are apt to think of it as simply marking a certain point of time—as telling us that the conversation which followed with His disciples took place after He had parted with the Pharisees and crossed the lake; but when we look at each word carefully we begin to understand the sorrowfulness of that day. "And He left them." That was not like our Saviour. God says, "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain." Christ says, "Ask, and ye shall receive." And the Pharisees had come and asked, and then these awful words follow—"And He left them." Supposing that for many years a man had gone round the world looking for a certain individual, and when he did find him, at once left him and went away, would you not expect to hear some explanation of his conduct? Even so. We read here that our Saviour came into the coasts of Dalmanutha. And let us remember He was no aimless voyager, no restless traveller whose steps were directed by love of change or search of fresh excitement. We think of Him as the guardian and leader of his people, guiding them every moment nearer Heaven—as One whose own steps were directed

by infinite wisdom and boundless love. He came into their coasts, leaving the multitudes whom He had fed. Nay more, for those coasts He had left the Father's Throne, the land that is above. And this visit to them had been arranged before the world was. Yet no sooner was it paid than almost immediately it was ended! No wonder He sighed deeply in spirit. No wonder there was such sorrow on His heavenly face that the disciples felt it too, and accustomed though they were to frequent journeyings and all the preparations their wandering life demanded, they forgot to take bread with them, and were left a weary, hungry company with but one loaf.

The words seem trifling to us, but they are amongst the most awful words contained in Holy Writ. "He left them." No ignorance could have driven Him away, no misunderstanding could have made Him leave, no mere foolishness on their part would have ended His visit to them. Such things would have vexed Him, but not for them would He have gone away. As you read the Gospels you will find that many came to Him in fear, in ignorance, or simple curiosity, but, although He may have rebuked them, you will not find that He ever left them. Nothing but great sin and great unbelief can have decided Him to leave their coasts. We may guess the greatness of the sin by the greatness of the punishment, and above all by the greatness of His sorrow. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." If they had wanted Him to stay, He would not have left them before He had blessed them.

CHRIST'S EASY YOKE

1 JOHN V. 3. PSALM XIX. 10-11

" His commandments are not grievous."

WHEN such a man as the Apostle John says " His commandments are not grievous," we say it was easy for him to speak so. But how ? Had he not the very same commandments to keep as we have ? Had he not rather a great many to keep that you and I have not got ? As far as this world counts success he was utterly unsuccessful. He had amassed no fortune. He had neither wife, nor child, nor home, nor life-long companions. He had bitter enemies. He had been many a day in prison. Sixty years ago he had heard Christ say, " My yoke is easy, and My burden is light," and now, more tried than any of us, more disappointed and having done a millionfold more, he says, " His commandments are not grievous."

Ah, but, we say, the circumstances were different. John had seen Christ and knew Christ. True ; but the disciples, and John amongst the rest, knew less of Christ than you and I may do. John was very young when he became Christ's apostle, and though he loved Christ he did not understand Christ's aims, or Christ's work of redemption. The three and a half years passed quickly and he did not grip Christ's great purpose. Why, he was asked to be one of the three

to uphold Christ in His agony in Gethsemane, to be in the secret place of the Almighty, and he fell asleep! When the night came, and when Christ was suddenly taken away from his side, and within fifteen hours was crucified on a tree with ignominy and shame, would it not all seem like a dream? And even Christ's resurrection and frequent appearances to His disciples and His ascension would seem still more like a dream. It was only when He parted from them on Olivet that for the first time they really knew what He was, and to the end of their lives the disciples were exactly on the same footing as you and I are. They had to pray to an absent Lord. He was no more present with them than He is with you and me. When John says, "His commandments are not grievous," surely we may trust his word.

May we not trust God Himself? We think He has no knowledge of our state, no heart that cares for us. And all the time He knows exactly what we want—all our hopes and all our fears. Whatever is in us, is known to Him, for He made us. His commandments are not grievous, because they are the commandments of a God of love, who wishes to be our God. That is the meaning of—"I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God." He is so full of love that He cannot bear to be forgotten by us for one moment.

God keeps His own commandments. And He will give us grace to keep them. He binds Himself to make us partakers of the Divine Nature. If we carry the burden He will carry us.

JESUS FOR EVERYONE

MARK II. 10. PSALM LXXX. 17.

"Son of Man."

THIS is a title applied to Ezekiel upwards of seventy times. It was Christ's favourite name for Himself. Ezekiel never calls himself so; on the contrary Christ is never called Son of Man by anyone save Himself, except on two occasions—when Stephen was being stoned to death, and when John was an exile on the Isle of Patmos; then each had a glimpse into Heaven and is said to have seen the Son of Man.

It is a name intended to show us the position He takes up as our Mediator. The first man sinned and we became God's enemies. The second Adam, the Son of Man, is also the Son of God. We are restored not by anything of the earth, but by heavenly power and grace. The Jews were unwilling to recognise Him as God, and there are many in our own day who have the same difficulty; but a greater difficulty to the world is to recognise Him as the Son of Man. When He takes that name He shows us that He is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, not only as truly a man as any one of us, but Son of Man—of all mankind—the light that lighteth every man. He is the only one who had no limit to His interests or affections. The ordinary man is limited. He only cares for the

interests of his village or city—if he takes a wider range, the interests of his country. Even a godly man aiming at Christ's work is a limited man : e.g., " The Apostle to the Gentiles." If not limited in that way he is limited in respect of family, or temper, or age. He may get on well with certain people but not with others. But Christ was interested in all. Men and women, young and old, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, came to Him and were welcomed. Samaritans, Syrophenicians, Greeks, Romans, sought Him. He could be spoken to at any hour of the day or night. He never refused to listen or to help. He could talk of ploughmen and sowers and fishermen, and in the next moment of a king and a marriage feast. He could describe the prodigal son and the prodigal's brother. He gave everyone the wise answer he needed. How widely different were those who spoke to Him in His last hours ! A Roman judge and a Jewish king condemned Him ; an African carried His cross ; He was crucified as a malefactor between two thieves, and yet over His head an inscription in three languages proclaimed Him King.

Christ has a portion for us. If He were to walk through our streets to-day, is there any of you that would be unwilling to run and meet Him ? You who are vexed, or sad, or a stranger—is He not well worth coming to ?

A CERTAIN POOR WIDOW

MARK XII. 42. PSALM LXVIII. 5.

" She threw in two mites, which make a farthing."

HERE we have the smallest possible fortune and the biggest possible blunder. Her fortune amounted to " two mites that make a farthing," a small enough portion for anyone, but most of all for a widow. And God calls Himself the Husband of the widow. " The widow's Judge " is one of His attributes. Yet He had allowed her to come so low as this ! But she was no poorer after all than He was Himself. The Son of God, who looked at her, had that very day said, " Show me a penny." A few hours afterwards He was to die as a malefactor and all He wore was to be taken from Him. " They divided My raiment among them, and for My vesture they did cast lots." He had not where to lay His head. He came hungry looking for fruit on the fig tree by the wayside and found none. They were the two poorest people in Palestine at that moment. May we not say that God Himself is at this moment poor ? The silver and the gold are His, yet He gives it all to the sons of men and takes back the least amount they are willing to give. Poor as she was when she left her home this widow was poorer when she returned to it. She had given her all.

Did she not make a very big blunder ? She might

at least have kept back one of the mites. I fancy, even with all we now know, if such a widow came to ask us if she did right in casting in all she had, we should say No. We should say, God asks that from no one. He asked a tenth, asked what we could give with all our heart, but He never said, "Give up all." That is, at least, what you and I would say. There was imprudence, there was almost presumption, in her putting herself into a difficulty, establishing such a principle that what she did once she was almost bound to do again. Had it been a compulsory thing, duty was duty, but a voluntary gift—why there would be no end to it. But there was a greater blunder. That money was meant to go to God, but it only went to the High Priests—to men who were making God's house a den of thieves. She might have seen that for herself. That money was to go to pay the traitor, and the temple guard that smote Christ on the face, and the soldiers who were to deny Christ's rising from the dead. She was giving money to put the King of Glory to death—that very King of Glory whose honour lay so close to her loving heart.

HER DEED HER NAME

MARK XII. 44. PSALM CVII. 41.

"She of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."

I HAVE spoken of the widow's fortune and her blunder. What about her reward? Was it not the greatest possible?

We spoke of her fortune—two mites, but she had the priceless heritage of love to God—love in spite of widowhood and loneliness and helplessness—such love that she could keep back nothing from Him.

And she had such faith that she could ask God to do anything for her—faith that there was no gift too great to expect, no time too long to look forward to. She had faith when she came, and more faith when she went away.

And such faith is accompanied with perfect peace and calmness; and self-possession, which means the possession of God.

There must have been joy, too—the feeling that now God must come to her before the day was done.

She made His Kingdom come. She prepared a highway for her God.

She cast in the money and said nothing, but God knew her case. Whether Christ knew it by special revelation, or knew it simply as man, wise and holy,

who can tell the look that self-surrender—which means claiming God—ever brings, we cannot tell. But He knew. She had a Saviour, the Son of God, looking at her, talking about her, wondering at her, comforted and glorified by her. He saw her blunder but He saw her love and knew she meant the money for Him.

Lastly, look at her fame. Her name is not mentioned, in order that whenever she is referred to we may have to describe her by what she did. Her name is her deed. She went away an unknown woman but in Heaven what she did is told for a memorial of her, and as saints enter the Better Land her glory increases every hour.

O woman, casting thy two mites, how is't
  Thy name's not given ?
Himself a widow's son, the Evangelist
  Might well have striven
—" Hush ! hush ! it was the doing of the Christ.

This silence that my Master on me laid
  Increased her fame !
Her glory's all the greater, for He made
  Her Deed her Name—
The widow that did cast in all she had."

WHAT KNOW WE GREATER THAN THE SOUL?

MARK V. 7. PSALM XLIX. 6-9.

"Torment me not."

ONE can see that as long as a man with a devil came to the synagogue Satan was bound even more than the man. But here we should say there is no hope. The man's mind was gone, he was worse than a wreck. He was abandoned by his friends. They had done all they could. At last they had to bind him hand and foot, and the chains had been plucked asunder. No man could tame him. Yet at that very hour Christ, weary and worn, was going into the wilderness to seek a sheep that was lost.

The devils believe there is a God, and tremble. They are completely under His control. They cry "Torment me not," and that is the worst feature of a devil's character. Christ died to save sinners and Satan calls it torment. I beseech you to examine yourselves. Do you feel it a torment to see Christ coming? A torment when the hour for family worship comes, or the hour of prayer, or the Sabbath day?

These devils had the opportunity of praying to Christ, and their one wish was that He would not send them into hell. That gives us as fearful a picture of hell as anything in God's Word—a legion of them

preferring to dwell with a man cutting himself in the tombs—nay, even preferring to dwell in swine, to have a swine's heart, and brain, and life. That is what your soul and mine can sink to.

Here seems a break in the Divine love. The swine were God's creatures. We do not know all the particulars; but these Gadarenes had no right to keep them. It was an ungodly trade.

One would have said that would be the happiest day in all their coast. That man must have been a terror to their children, a stumbling-block to their faith. Yet they besought Christ to depart. Would it not have been well for them to have asked Him to stay? They had lost 2,000 swine, but they had won a soul. There are those who sneer at giving to missions and say it costs a tremendous amount of money to save souls. We give thousands to adorn a church, to raise a monument, millions to build ironclads or to carry on a war, but a soul that is worth more than a world we count dear if we have to pay five pounds. Our statesmen grant that drink is a curse. They can educate people and get up excitement and interest on other matters, but where souls are being lost they say, "What would become of the revenue?" We are worse than the Gadarenes. If they had lived in our day, it would not have been enough to have asked Christ to get out of this country, they would have made Him pay for the 2,000 swine, and the greatest statesman would have been the man who could get the most favourable terms.

OUTSIDE THE CITY WALLS

HEBREWS XIII. 12. PSALM CIX. 2-3.

" Jesus also suffered without the gate."

THE death of Christ looked at from every point of view is unlike anything else in all history. When He went forth to die He was literally driven out of the city and this was the more awful in view of the lateness of His triumphal entry into it. It had been only on the past Sabbath He had ridden in in triumph, the multitude cheering, the children crying, " Hosanna." It was further the city that He had loved with all His heart. Every street was dear to Him—streets consecrated by many a prayer and many a kind deed. It was Passover time, when the city was filled with strangers, many of whom saw Him for the first time and cruelly misjudged Him. Now He is driven out to be crucified as a malefactor, with His accusation carried in front of Him, accompanied by a rabble, spitting and jeering, the chief men of Jerusalem mocking, soldiers pressing on Him, His raiment and His face covered with His own blood.

Christ was not only rejected by man, but by God. At other great turning-points in His history God owned Him—" This is My beloved Son." But from the time He was in Gethsemane till He died, the wrath of God was poured out in ever greater and greater

fury. We have had dark moments when things went against us, but we had ten thousand mercies. There was not one mercy on the cross. But when God had utterly cast Him off, had He been anything but God manifest in flesh, the prayer, "Remember me when Thou comest in Thy Kingdom," would have wrung forth such words as "My Kingdom? There is no love, no hope for Me." It was the crowning proof of His perfect holiness that, amid all, He could say, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

And that is the secret of why it was outside the city wall. The sin-offering was a type of Him. It was burnt as utterly useless—the very ashes unholy—outside the camp. It meant our need that sin should be utterly taken away. There is nothing in the death of Christ unless He died for us. What is the sting of death? It is sin. The sin is mine and God is justly angry. Our acceptance with God comes through Christ. The old sacrifice could not make the comer perfect. But His flesh is meat indeed, and His blood is drink indeed.

They cast Him outside the gate, and on the Sabbath He came in again and entered the shut doors. And why? Because God was as much reconciled to us as to Him. In us He sees no iniquity. My Lord died for me. And again He went forth without the city walls, accompanied by believers and attended by angels, leading them out as far as to Bethany, and once more His hands were stretched out in blessing.

JESUS BLESSING CHILDREN

MARK X. 13. PSALM VIII. 12.

" And they brought young children to Him."

THERE were two classes of people, in the Gospels, not one of whom ever lifted up voice against our Saviour. No woman ever spoke against Him, and no child. There is not much mention of children, but whenever they are brought before us the narrative becomes wonderfully sweet. The story before us is one of great beauty. Jesus was now bidding good-bye to Galilee, never again to see it till He visited it as the risen Lord. He was on His last journey to Jerusalem. Enemies were round Him on every side, and just as when for the last time He trod the streets of Jerusalem the children followed Him crying, " Hosanna to the Son of David," so now as He bids farewell to Galilee the little children were brought to Him, as Matthew says, that " He might lay His hands on them and pray " ; and Christ—this Christ of infinite love—was much displeased because the disciples wished to keep them away.

They were having a very interesting conversation with Christ about marriage, its duties and trials, and it annoyed them that it should be interrupted. Does not the same thing occur in our homes every day ? There is some opportunity of telling the children about Christ, of getting a blessing for them, and parents

are too much interested in another pursuit. They have some book they wish to read, some subject to discuss, some lecture to attend, and the children must seek their pleasures and their companions elsewhere. Why, your children may have little enough reason to love you when they grow up. They may not ask you to be their companions and their counsellors then. A man's first duty is to his own household. Children very soon see where your love lies, they have a swift, accurate way of judging, and if ever you are tempted to continue any pursuit that would keep them outside the circle of your love, remember that Christ stopped His discourse and showed His first duty was to them.

The disciples would have deprived these children of a blessing. What good could they get? We may be sure it did them some good. It was not for nothing Christ took them in His arms and blessed them. They would also have prevented the parents getting a blessing. God always likes to make His favours as wide as possible. If anyone comes with a petition for another, that one gets a blessing for himself. And it would have made Heaven less happy that day. You remember that wonderful passage—"Their angels (the children's angels) do always behold the face of My Father." To keep a little child away deprives Christ of joy. "Hearest Thou what these say?" "Yea, have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?" That singing in the temple was a most glorious moment. The sweetest singers are the little children. It is good for little children to come to the house of God.

THE WEB OF LIFE

JOB VII. 6. PSALM CXLIV. 4.

" My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle."

WE may follow out the metaphor further and note :

(1) *The preparation needed before we begin*—the loom set up, the great frame, the yarn, the wool, or the silk, or the linen. There is an endless chain of events before the weaver begins. So for each of us God has chosen the lot of our inheritance—a wonderful process even from the beginning, but more so the older the world is. Just as in a building the first stones rest on the foundation, but the higher you go they rest on this and that, until you find each stone related as it were to every other, so you and I are here after 6,000 years of Providences, set down to our task.

(2) *The constancy of the work.* In a weaving village, more than in most places, there was steady work and the same steady work. The weaver was always at it —from early dawn till after the sun had set. There was the unceasing click-clack of the loom. Yet the ordinary shuttle may stop and the weaver cease from his work. There may be no orders, no yarn, no thread, and the shuttle empty. But in life we dare not stop. We never do stop. Nay, we often do our hardest work when we are resting—our most serious work when we are playing. Just as an engineer

sets his engine agoing and can go away for five minutes or five hours, and the thing goes on, so we are always weaving—weaving our own characters. We are always throwing the shuttle.

And here comes a strange difficulty—an ordinary weaver weaves at his own loom, and meddles with no other man's, but the world is a vast weaving shop, so to speak, and every step we take sends a shuttle, every look we give sends a shuttle, every word we speak, every thought we think.

Most of us have had our lives strangely altered by the action of some person. Young people do not see it so clearly, but old folks do. A word spoken five and twenty years ago, a man making a casual remark, overhearing something and repeating it to you. "And the man said, I heard them say: Let us go to Dothan" (Genesis xxxvii. 17). That altered Joseph's whole life. One may be silent to guard oneself against consequences—but we cannot. Reticence is more powerful than speech. Inactivity may be deadly as well as masterly. I am every moment shaping my own character. I am myself, as it were, a shuttle—a difficult shuttle to every man that meets me. Just as in a fabric, a little bit of colour, a beautiful thread, a pretty piece of ornament may be introduced, so we may sweeten and beautify life—add a touch of red, a bit of blue, a flower in the window, a gleam of gold.

DISCIPLES ON THE SEA AND CHRIST ON THE MOUNTAIN

MARK VI. 46. PSALM CXLVIII. 7-8.

"He departed into a mountain to pray."

CHRIST had been prevented from having the solitude He desired, and when He had sent the multitude away, although He was weary He set Himself to do the duty from which He had been hindered. That was ever His way. We are glad of an excuse to prevent us reading God's Word, or engaging in prayer, but our Saviour's feeling was this—the very fact that He was prevented made it more necessary. Luther used to say, "I have so much to do to-day, I must pray longer."

The disciples had been much cast down by the death of John the Baptist. One and all had set their hopes on this world, its glory and honour. They expected to be made princes. John the Baptist was known personally to them. He had been their master, and now he was dead. Things, however, had turned again. That very day Christ had fed 5,000, and another Evangelist tells us the multitude had wanted to make Him a king—the very thing the disciples had set their heart on. But Christ compelled them to get into the ship. It was a trial to them. They had to be forced away when the hour that they wanted seemed to have come. Worse still, the

people were left behind—the people who were going to crown Him! And then the storm arose. They had before them a five miles' course, and had only accomplished three miles in eight or nine hours' time. And they were alone on a wild dark sea! The day had ended very differently from what they expected. It is often so with ourselves. Christ never meant us to be separated from Him, but we have often insisted on our own way. The disciples wanted to be kings. Ere an hour or two, they would have been well content to be on dry land.

And what was Christ doing? He was alone, praying. It was not simply a habit. He loved to pray. "I and My Father are one." So we can never know the joy of earth till we know the joy of communion with the Father? And Christ needed to pray. It had been a day of heavy trial. The people and also the disciples had completely misunderstood Him. He had talked about eternal life—they thought only of the loaves and fishes. The crown He wished to wear was far different from the one the multitude offered Him. Salvation, holiness, heaven—these were His aims; theirs, nothing beyond this world. There is no pain like that of being misunderstood by those we love, and that drove Christ many a night to His knees.

And all the time He saw them toiling in rowing. He was in communion with the Father, and yet His thoughts were with them, and He came to them. Not that their lives were actually in danger, but just because they were so vexed and so weary He came.

JOHN THE AGED

3 JOHN 1. PSALM XC. 10.

"The Elder."

WE see here an old man's weakness. We know John best by his Gospel, which shows him as then he was—the young, strong, hardy fisherman, whose keen eye could recognise the dim form of his Lord further than his companions, and who outran even Peter, eager as he was. The other apostles have now entered into rest, most of them in the prime of life. John is the sole survivor of the most illustrous band of men the world ever saw. At least sixty years have passed since he watched his Lord go up to Heaven in a cloud, and he is now past ninety. The weariness of old age has come to him. He takes up his pen eagerly, but he writes a very short letter, and is just as glad to lay it down again. The token has come to him that his Master is waiting for him. It is well for us to recognise these Divine messengers. The passing away of old pleasures, the shortening of our daily walk, the increasing roughness and steepness of the road, are all loud calls to us. "The Master, the Bridegroom, cometh."

We also see here an old man's strength. Short as the letter is, it is yet the letter of one whose words are well ordered, and the variety of subject is very great. No one could say, "There's nothing in it." The man

was acquainted with Christ, and he had learned the art of speech from Him. And in his old age, intellectually this man is strong, vigorous in action, firm in purpose, still knowing what he is about, and still willing to work for God. God is plainly all in all to him, his refuge and his strength, the God who has delivered Him out of six troubles and will not forsake him in the seventh.

We should note the old man's growth in grace. There was a time when he would have called down fire from Heaven. There is the old zeal, but the old fury is gone. The oil in his lamp burns sweetly, no dross of earthly passion mingles with it now. "Beloved, imitate not that which is evil" is all he says.

See also the old man's honours. One is that he has the right to confer honours. There was no commoner name among the Romans than Gaius. John lifts it up and makes it famous for all time—the man whom Christ's beloved loved. And there is this special honour God has put on John—He encloses in His Book a little letter like this. One is tempted to say, had it not been in the Bible it would have been no great loss—there is no new view of truth in it. Yet God has preserved it. I have no doubt that in the great days that are before the Church men will see things in the epistle we never saw, and they will wonder at our blindness.

AN ESCORT OF SAINTS

ACTS. XXVIII. 15. PSALM XXVII. 14.

" Whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage."

WE all admire courage. There is no decoration so coveted as the Victoria Cross—one pennyworth of bronze, but with the words " For Valour." There are many imitations of courage. There is what we call despair—the old Roman way of meeting death, of dying by one's own hand. There is no courage there. That is simply leaving one's post before one is released, despairing of the future, believing there is no further power with God. And there is the courage of bravado, of recklessness, of vanity. We all need courage, and if God does not always give it to us, it is that we may be kept near Him, always applying to Him.

One would have thought that Paul of all men possessed it. He had faced death and shame already times without number—death in every form, by land and by sea. He had faced mobs in Athens, in Ephesus, worst of all—in Jerusalem. He was as sure of salvation as any man could be. He had been caught up into Heaven. He had seen Christ. For twenty-four years he had faced all that man could face. He had had visions of God, had had a safe conduct from the Almighty. He had just been delivered from the perils of shipwreck. Yet it seems, after all, Paul had only

got a loan of courage. We see him going forward in fear and trembling, with little joy but with absolute steadfastness and fidelity.

Paul was a scholar, a saint and a man ; and he was entering Italy with a chain. That must have been a hard trial. He was in great loneliness. He had been lonely enough on the ship, but on it he had acquired a character and a position, and also when on the Island. In past days an angel had stood by to cheer him. Now God's work is done by a few Christians. I suppose some of them would be very poor--doubtless men who had been slaves—perhaps great sinners—but men who had the look of saints and walked with the step of the redeemed. Paul had no reason to be ashamed of the friends who had come to meet him. It is pleasant to find men have been speaking kindly of you. The most unkind thing you can do for the cause of Christ is to keep silent about it. They had come forty-three miles—two days' journey and two back—to walk alongside a prisoner--not one whom Rome was waiting to receive. But it was a happy meeting and a happy ending to Paul's distressful journey. God said, as it were, " There is no need for Me to send one of My angels. These brethren will do My work and encourage Paul." So Paul thanked God, and took courage. That is what Christianity can do.

PARTING IN THE FEAR OF GOD

GENESIS XXXI. 55. PSALM CXXXIII. 1.

"And Laban departed."

JACOB and Laban were parting for life—and in anger. One would have thought there was no need to part. Jacob was returning to the land of promise, the land of his fathers. Twenty years he had dwelt with Laban and whatever his faults were, and they were neither few nor small, he had never concealed the fact that he had seen God and His angels, and that His God was the only true God. Laban must have felt Jacob possessed something he did not possess. He had a glorious opportunity of casting in his lot with God, but if he had any convictions he consoled himself with a pious reflection and departed.

Need I advise you all, and especially the young, to hold as long as you can by anyone who is a friend of God. That one may have faults—may interfere with you and wrong you and hurt you in many ways, but if amid all his faults you have reason to believe he is a child of God, let that outweigh a thousand disadvantages. The man who loves God and who loves you may make a mistake, may deprive you of some pleasure, but the godly man's house is a house of God. Better be a doorkeeper there than dwell in tents of sin.

There are partings that are right and partings that are wrong, but right or wrong there are still duties to be performed on both sides. Partings may lead us to help others. We never can quite break off connection with anyone in the world. It is but a little place after all. The fact that anyone's circumstances remind us of our own case long ago gives that one a claim on us. We may have parted in anger from our heart's best brother, never again to meet, but we come to know one who had his trials or his failings—that is our brother who was lost to us. From one point of view no one should be a stranger to us. Should we be careless of a soul because that soul is not ours? Is not the highest love God's love, a love that overflows to all? If God parts you from one to whom you were wont to perform a duty, pass on your love, your tenderness, your skill to some other.

We should tell all the good we possibly can of those from whom we are parted. We should strive by God's grace to make another's crown as bright as possible. It is a pitiable selfishness that makes us fret to see another lead a holier or more honourable life than we do. No man can take your crown, but by striving to rob another of his you rob yourself of one. Widen, broaden, the stream of their usefulness, and pray often for them. They may be in great peril. Perhaps they cannot pray for themselves.

FORGET NOT ALL HIS BENEFITS

MARK VIII. 18. PSALM LXXVII. 10-11.

" Do ye not remember? "

So great was the sorrow of the little band of disciples that they forgot to lay in any provisions. Our Saviour was still thinking of the sin and folly of the Pharisees, and He gives His disciples a word of warning. But the mention of leaven reminded them of their forgetfulness. Our Saviour rebuked them, and in the words He now addressed to them, and especially the last clause, " Do ye not remember ? " we are taught that the remembrance of the past is a comfort in the present. Our daily bread is, of course, the great object of our life here. We are all commanded to pray, " Give us this day our daily bread," and to strive for its fulfilment, and yet I suppose we all have at times the fear on our minds that health or work may fail and that there may come a day when we shall be reduced to our last loaf. Now, I would say, first of all, " Beware of the leaven of wickedness." Set your affection on things above, and trust God for the rest. And secondly, " Remember." Remember what ? Remember God's goodness in the years that are past. Our experiences have all been different, but there is one thing we all have known—that goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life. Our

Saviour had just newly performed a miracle and He says, "Do ye not remember?" Why, they had not had time to forget: only a few hours had passed. So when you are cast down, I would say, "Do ye not remember?" You do not need to go back to the time of the children of Israel in the wilderness, or the widow of Sarepta, or the prophet Elijah. Do ye not remember this morning? Two or three hours ago we sat down to a meal. Did we deserve it? No. Who gave us it? God. For whose sake did we get it? For Christ's sake. Every meal time is a solemn moment.

But this saying of Christ's has a far wider scope. We hear of some people who live in the past and others who bury the past. In one sense we ought to live in the past. I fancy there are times when we all fear God will not have mercy on us. But does Christ not say, "Do ye not remember?" Have you not heard again and again in the past that God's mercy is sure? We sometimes complain that ministers preach the same thing over and over again. Yet in one sense what else can a minister do? What else should he do? We grumble at the repetition Sabbath after Sabbath of familiar truths, yet these are the very things which, if we take them in, are our very life—the very things we need to remember for our joy and comfort. When we are tired of these truths and say, "I've heard that hundreds of times," let us ask ourselves if it is a thing we really understand.

THE CHRISTIAN'S PANOPLY

EPH. VI. 13. PSALM CXLIV. 1 2

"The whole armour of God."

THE Christian is a soldier whose business it is to fight, and the fact that complete armour is provided shows at once his danger and his security.

Now there are very few Christians that have got on the whole armour and are completely equipped. You find trembling Christians, doubting Christians, half-hearted Christians, wounded Christians: good people, but much of their comfort, much of their strength, is gone. The crowning differences between man and man are not intellectual, they are spiritual, they depend on the way we use God's armour.

There is the girdle of truth. With us a man would throw off his coat, but an ancient soldier wrapped his garments tightly together. He would get all his strength in—do his very best to show all men his sincerity and honesty. How many Christians impress one with such a sense as that? There is the breast-plate of righteousness—God's and our own. Why is the devil not ashamed to tempt us as he does, with low desires, unhallowed pleasures? Why do we not put him to flight instantly with such a breast-plate? How few again have the shield of faith? Fears for body and soul, fiery darts straight from hell

attack us. We are afraid of to-morrow. We are anxious about food and raiment. We are afraid God does not care for us, and all our life is subject to bondage—we have no sense of security. And how few, alas, have their feet shod and their heads helmeted! God does not mean the Christian to hide behind his shield, cowering. He is to stand erect, with his head above his shield, and his feet ready for action, determined to end this strife and win this fight.

So, lastly, the Christian has a sword. He has not to submit passively, not to tire out his enemy, but to rise and strike him and chase him.

The Christian's armour is for a hand-to-hand fight, a single combat. In modern warfare soldiers may never see their enemy, but it was different when man fought with man and must either conquer or die. There are some battles against common foes in which others join us, but the decisive battles are those in which we stand or fall for ourselves. It is not our attitude towards Protestantism, or Calvinism, that saves us, but our attitude towards God. We may help to ward off a common foe, but if in the matter of personal religion we fail, we are undone. No man can help us. God shelters us by His providence and circumstances keep us from temptation, but the day comes when we have to fight.

But there is a great encouragement for us in this wrestling combat, and it is this—if we fall, God raises us up again. We can renew the fight and it is not decided so long as we have the will to fight on.

MARK AND HIS MOTHER

ACTS XII. 12. PSALM II. 6-7.

"The mother of John Mark."

WE cannot tell who shall be counted greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. It may be some of those whose names are recorded in Scripture—say Moses or John or Paul: it may be some who have died and left neither story nor name behind them; it may be some who are living now, or are yet to be born; but we know this much, there will be some whom all the saints will know, to whom everybody will be somewhat indebted, some the very mention of whose names will stir up a love that began even on earth. I do not suppose any will be better known in that great day than the four Evangelists—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Other men have been the benefactors of one generation or one country, but these four for 1,800 years have been known to the world and shall be known more and more as the years roll on; and while every one is worthy of honour who has spoken for God to men, surely they are even more so who have preserved for us the story of our Saviour's life and death and resurrection. God could have bestowed no greater honour on them than to make them the historians of the three most solemn years in the world's history, and of the most awful hour in all eternity.

Mark was the son of a godly mother. She was one of the illustrious Marys who ministered to our Saviour's wants when He was living, still honoured Him when they thought He was dead, and risked their very lives for His sake. It was to this Mary's house Peter went that night he was rescued from prison by the angel. There were many gathered together praying, and she must have been as brave as she was godly, for, so to speak, she had given up her house to be the church at a time when Herod stretched out his hand to vex the church and slew the Apostle James with the sword. Yet Mary would shelter it. Whilst God at times, to illustrate His sovereignty and keep us from despairing, brings the noblest servants out of the strangest families, as a general rule the best men in the world are granted as God's greatest gift to the best women. It was so in the most critical period of the world's history, the beginning of the Christian era. John the Baptist, John the Apostle, Timothy, our Lord Himself, were all entrusted to the care of godly women. I ask you mothers, What do you desire for your children? Beauty and stature and a lovable temper and cleverness? Rather give God no rest day nor night till He takes up His abode in the hearts of your little ones. The fault is not that parents desire too much and are too ambitious—they are not ambitious enough.

GOD'S INTEREST IN ANCESTRY

GENESIS XI. 10. PSALM LXXI. 17.

" These are the generations of Shem."

I DO not know of any life so appallingly lonesome as Shem's must have been. He seems, from the eleventh chapter of Genesis, to have seen about nine generations of his descendants, one after the other, die before him ! I have heard of an old man who said in a moment of despondency that he had lived so long that he thought God and death had forgotten he was still in existence. We may be sure that, lonely though he was, Shem never said anything like that. For he seems to have been one of the best of men, a man so near to God that God was not ashamed to be called his God -" The Lord God of Shem." Shem was the great connecting link between Adam and the children of Abraham, for Shem was Methuselah's contemporary for about ninety-nine years, and Methuselah had known Adam for two hundred and fifty-three years, and was perhaps present at his dying bed.

" These are the generations of Shem." This is one of God's roll-calls. I have often asked you to keep a careful record of your genealogy, so far as you can find it out. It shows you are interested in the past as well as in the days to come, that you are

conscious of the presence of a God who works out an eternal plan, works it out in marvellous ways, more marvellous than we can imagine. It is proof of our belief in immortality, in judgment, in retribution, in recompense. And if any of you say, I do not see what good it will do me—you show that you do not see the great end of your being. I would like you to feel you are a link in a chain—a chain that began in eternity, that has been forged sometimes in the fires of affliction, sometimes in chastisement, sometimes in gentlest guidance, always in love and wisdom ; a chain that binds past and future eternity all round, a chain on which God may hang weights too great for human comprehension, the destinies of immortal souls, the destinies of nations, the glory of His own dear Son.

Some are interested only in genealogies when it becomes a question of money, forgetting there are other inheritances ; honours, prayers, shame, sorrow, duty. There are incidents that bind us to God—that bind us to man, debts our forefathers incurred that we must pay.

Certainly these things are all written in God's book because they are interesting to Him. Christ liked to call Peter " son of Jonas " ; He Himself loved to be called David's son. Do not shut yourself off. We are meant to share in the glory of those who have gone before us. It is not for nothing the New Testament begins with a genealogy, chiefly to show us that the Son of God is the Son of Man.

UNDER THE FIG-TREE

JOHN I. 48. PSALM XXXIII. 18.

"I saw thee."

JOHN is the only Evangelist who tells us anything about Nathanael. The disciple who loved Christ most and who was most beloved by Christ is the one who seems to have loved his fellow disciples most. As if he wanted to show they were all disciples whom Jesus loved.

Our Saviour describes Nathanael as an Israelite in whom there is no guile. It is strange Nathanael should have come to be regarded as the type of a weak, inoffensive man. Does it not show how sadly human nature has fallen when guilelessness should be taken for stupidity? Christ never meant that. To be guileless is to be as a little child, to hold out our hands to God and let Him lead us where He chooses, asking no questions, troubled by no fears, having large expectations.

John gives us two characteristics of the guileless man.

The first is that he is to be found under the fig-tree, that is to say, he loves to be engaged in prayer and meditation. A man's fig-tree is just where he delights to be in secret with God. As you go about the house attending to your daily work—that is a fig-tree. As you walk along the street—along a country road—

there you may be under His shadow with great delight. Especially should our roof-tree be our fig-tree.

" I saw thee " : is not that a beautiful and comforting word ? Only once did God turn away His face from a praying soul, and that was His only begotten Son ; and because He cried underneath the trees in the garden of Gethsemane, and cried in vain, we shall never pray under the fig-tree without hearing the voice of the Lord very near us. There is a word of warning also to us : " I saw thee." Would we not often be ashamed if our friends knew the coldness of our hearts —if they could come in when the door is shut and catch the lifeless petitions offered by us, as if we were half asleep ? If our prayers are heartless, if we find no delight in them, let us remember Christ's " I saw thee."

The second characteristic of a childlike man is this, that he has a rapid perception of the truth. He dwells in the shadow of the Almighty and knows His secret. At first, Nathanael disbelieved. Nazareth ? Seemingly there was Scripture against that, but Philip said, " Come and see." And those are the words God ever addresses to us. We would see, and then come, but we must take His word first and come, we must enter the Kingdom of Heaven like a little child simply through faith. Nathanael came and saw, and believed —all because Christ said, " I saw thee " ; though Nathanael had not a bit of proof for it. He went in for no speculations, yet he uses words that it took the other disciples a long, long time to reach—" Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel ! "

GREATER THINGS TO COME

JOHN I. 50. PSALM XXXIV. 15.

"Thou shalt see greater things than these."

IN looking back at our acquaintance with someone, or our stay in some house or town, the first two or three days and the last stand out distinctly in our recollection. First days and last days are present in memory with equal distinctness. It would appear it was so with the Apostle John. He had the grandest friendship there ever was on earth, and when he, an old man, sits down at the bidding of God to tell of Him who was his Friend, the Altogether Lovely, we find him spending two whole chapters on the first three days; and if we turn to the end of his book, chapters xii to xx inclusive are taken up with the last week—almost with the last night of our Lord's life. So we find it is John who tells us most, or almost all we know about Philip and Andrew and even Peter himself. It is touching to think of John, the old man, left all alone, beginning his book by telling of the love Christ had for Nathanael and Nathanael for Christ, and closing it with the love Christ had for Peter and Peter for Christ. John's desire was to show that Christ is love, that we love Him because He first loved us, and that whom He loves He loves unto the end.

Christ said to Nathanael, "Thou shalt see greater things than these." What were they? First of all, the sufferings of Christ and His humiliation. The dream of the ladder let down from Heaven came to Jacob in the days of his banishment, his loneliness, his poverty. It was Heaven opened to a wanderer from his father's house. So the ladder represents Christ in His humiliation. Nathanael says, "Thou art the Son of God." Christ says, "You will see Me as the Son of Man." You cannot know the Son of God until you know the Son of Man, and His glory is that He left His Father's house, that He had not where to lay His head, that He was ministered to just as we are. He who was Lord of the angels, who gave them strength and fed them with heavenly food, had Himself to be fed and strengthened by them. He who had sent them flying swiftly was now dependent on them for comfort and help. He who dwelt between the cherubim was to have them watching His dead body.

Then there were the glories yet to come—the day of Christ's ascension, the day of Nathanael's own death and entrance into glory—that eternity of glory that is to be ushered in on the Judgment Morn, when Christ shall come in the glory of His Father and all the holy angels, and every eye shall see Him; and then Christ's own "Well done!" from the Father, and His "Well done!" to Nathanael, at the last day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed. Such were some of the "greater things" Nathanael was to see.

THE LOVE OF MONEY

EXODUS XX. 15. PSALM XXXVII. 21.

"Thou shalt not steal."

THE greater part of our life in this world is taken up with our dealings with our fellow men, that is, with the earning and spending of money. It determines our actions every day. It makes our character. In a word, if all the money we made and spent were entered in a book as we made and spent it our whole character before God and man would be laid bare.

I have often spoken about honesty in earning money; let me add a warning against greed. There is a meanness we are tempted to fall into. I do not say it is wrong to give a boy or girl a penny—it is one of the pleasures of childhood—but I would ask you to teach your children to take a pleasure in doing little kindnesses without expecting money. There are often aged, poor, and infirm neighbours, who have no one to run an errand. A godly mother will teach her boy to help such, and to count it one of the joys of life. I would say to boys and girls, Do these things in kindness and great will be your reward. God will pay you. But if you take a penny for it, or a shilling a month, you have all the reward you will ever get in time or eternity. Those of you who are in trade or occupations in which money is apt to come in the form

of " tips " run a special risk. No man has a right to take an hour's pay for two minutes' work. Of course I do not refer to work that is the result of a life's training. Money that comes lightly goes lightly. Every master and every company should pay their labourers a fair, honest wage, so that a man should know what his income is and do his work ungrudgingly.

A man has no right to make shameful profits. He has a right to a fair profit on the time and energy and skill he has laid out, but he has no right to say, " A man must live, and he is entitled to get as much profit as he can." I think many a tradesman would blush to tell how much he made by certain kinds of goods. I just ask you to remember that God knows it all already, and the world will know some day.

The great law is the law of love. Beware of tricks of trade. Do not think you are justified in doing dishonestly because others force you to. Keep a conscience void of offence. Do not begin to argue with your conscience. Do not put a shilling to the price of goods only to take it off. Then, you say, you may as well shut the shop. Perhaps so. But better shut your shop than shut the door of your heart against God and the door of heaven against yourself.

MONEY A STEWARDSHIP

EXODUS XX. 15. PSALM LXVI. 18.

"Thou shalt not steal."

ABOVE all things I entreat you never to enter into debt. I plead with you who are girls never to wear a dress that is not paid for. There are more women ruined by sheer love of finery than the world knows. The husband that is won by such means will have to be kept by other means. Dress beautifully and tastefully, asking God to guide your taste and choice of colour and material. Make your dress one of the mansions that Christ has prepared. Our recollections of people are made up greatly of dress. We think of them in a certain guise. Your dress is part of yourself. Come plainly to church and market, and the consciousness of being honest, of not fearing to meet anyone nor having any question put to you you could not answer, will lend a sweetness to your face and an honesty to your prayers that will give you favour both in the sight of God and man.

And I entreat you who are mothers never to send your children to make a purchase without the money to pay it. Do not be afraid of their losing it. The care of money will be one of their tasks in life. It will do them good to feel that they are trusted. It will do the shopkeeper good, it will do other customers

good. Do not say, "We always pay on Saturday for the week." That may be all very well for yourselves, but get your children into the habit of seeing that getting a thing means paying for it. Show them that you glorify God in all you do.

It is hard to avoid extremes in this matter. Money is a glorious thing when honestly won, wisely spent, and when cheerfully given. The Bible shows how infinitely precious money can be—"two mites that make a farthing!" It has shown us how little may lead a man wrong—"Thirty pieces of silver." There are the two extremes—the extravagant who are always borrowing, who never have a penny but it must go; and there are those who are mean and grasping. Which side do we err on? Let us go to God and ask Him to open our eyes to look on our money as really His, as we would look on money that a person had given us to lay out. What did you do with it? How have you spent it?

Are any of you anxious? He knoweth the things ye have need of. Are any of you in debt? If you have defrauded butcher, or baker, or grocer, no matter how long ago, you have no right to put one halfpenny in the collection plate; your very attendance at church dishonours God unless it makes you go to your brother and say, "Forgive me."

Have I spoken too much about money? It is because it stands between you and Christ.

JESUS AND HIS GUESTS

MARK VI. 42. PSALM XXIII.

"They did all eat."

"AND the people outwent them:" Christ and His disciples had gone about five miles by sea to be alone, and the people interfered with the Divine plan. Yet He would not say them nay. Does this not show His love? It was good to be kind when He gathered them to Himself, but when they forced themselves upon Him, gave Him no rest, even then He could not resist them. They constrained Him. In Luke's Gospel (R.V.) we are told He *welcomed* them. In spite of great weariness Christ began to teach them many things. Even so, as long as we say, "God's will be done," we cannot pray too much. He will not be angry at our insisting on His attention. Now compare the human and the Divine. The disciples say, "The day is far spent—send them away." But there is no need ever to go away from Christ for anything. We sometimes think religion is opposed to business and pleasure. Not so. If we obey God we shall lack *no* good thing.

"He commanded them to make all sit down by companies on the green grass." Note Christ's orderliness and sense of beauty. He made this great multitude sit down by ranks in hundreds and fifties that they might be as comfortable and happy

and composed as possible. In the East, clothing is very gay and beautiful with all manner of bright colours. Scholars tell us it would be like garden plots filled with fair flowers. And here then is a solemn lesson to parents. There is no need for extravagance, but let the table at meal time be as beautiful as possible. It adds to the charm of a family meeting. It gives a sense of welcome and comfort, and it pleases God, with whom there is no slovenliness.

Next, "He blessed"—literally, He gave thanks. He praised God. That ought to form part of every meal. There are two extremes. There is a very hurried mumbling of a blessing, and there is the turning of it into a prayer. Also there is a common fault, the asking a longer blessing before strangers than we do when we are by ourselves. It is better to be short but hearty—not as if we were ashamed of it. Why, it is a wonderful delight, a moment of access to God so often every day, a linking of Heaven and earth, a taking of observations, as it were, directing our minds and thoughts heavenward, rising from the earth to heavenly places with Christ Jesus.

"Gather up the fragments." Let there be no waste. Leave everything tidy on the green grass. Common sense, nature itself, teaches us that we never know what we may need. We have no right to throw away one single thing good for food. The crusts we throw away, the money we spend on unnecessary luxuries, is the price of souls, and might be the means of winning great victories for God.

WALKING ON THE WATER

MATT. XIV. 31. PSALM XCIII. 3-4.

" Wherefore didst thou doubt ? "

GOD'S ways are not our ways, for God's ways are ways of love. The question put to Peter is not one any of us would have put. Our question would have been, " How dared you imagine that you could do what no other man had ever done ? " God's people had experienced great mercies in the waters. The sea fled. Jordan was driven back. Its waters stood as an heap till the ransomed passed over. But no one had ever dared to walk on it. It never occurred to the other disciples in the boat to go to Christ ; and were they not as good as Peter ? Was he not selfish ? They were doing their best, rowing hard, and he would leave them in their peril. But he had gone further, for he was actually putting himself on a level with His Lord.

How did Peter feel now that he had failed ? He had made a sorry exhibition of himself. How gallantly he had gone overboard ! How bravely had he walked a step or two upon the waves, and how ignominiously he had failed ! He not only had not walked on the water but he had to be saved from drowning. If we had been left to tell the story, how much mirth we could have got out of it ! But look at Christ and see

what He says. He does not seem to see any presumption in it. Why should not Peter walk on the water? Had God not shown before now that all things were for His chosen? Had not Enoch and Elijah climbed to the very gates of Heaven through the air? Had not the three brethren walked through the fire? Had not Daniel got the lions for his bodyguard? Why should not Peter walk on the sea?

Yes, Peter had done well. He had shown such love to his Master that he could not get to Him too quickly. He had forgotten possibilities, had ventured on a new element and claimed fellowship with Christ. Christ never found fault with a man for venturing on too big a task, but He finds fault with him for not going through with it.

"Wherefore didst thou doubt?" Peter saw the waves, and heard the wind roaring; he saw his own littleness; but he had seen Christ overcome all these before. Why doubt? Why not doubt? It was a task too big for him—one fit only for God.

Peter sank. He did not return swimming (that would have been dishonourable). He came back holding his Lord's hand. Even in his failure he honoured Christ. Christ must do it all, and Christ honoured him.

It was too glorious a morning to end in a common way. Christ had been praying all night. He had just refused a kingdom, and that meant a surrender for his followers as well as for Himself, but Peter had grasped the Divine love and shown that he loved his Lord.

JESUS THE CARPENTER

MARK VI. 1-6. PSALM LXXXI. 13-16.

"Is not this the carpenter? . . . And He could there do no mighty work . . . And He marvelled."

THERE are some passages that show Christ in His Godhead; others, in His Manhood. He is God, equal with the Father; but He was also man—a real man, and it is this side of His character that the passage brings before us. It opens up to us the trials of His life. It behoved Him, the Captain of our salvation, to be made perfect through suffering.

He had a human name, "Jesus," a very common name, too. His life in Nazareth was an everyday one. He started fair in the human race, taking no advantages of us. He asked men to be His followers, and by that He implies that we go the same road and have the very same chance.

He knew the joys of life. He was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." God hid His face from Him, smote Him as He did no other, but even in His darkest hour God showed Him marvellous loving-kindness. It is written, He "rejoiced in spirit." He took delight not only in the glory that should follow but in the grace He had.

He had an honourable trade. We talk of that work as humiliation, but it was no dishonour to the Son of

God to be a workman. It was His glory. It would be His duty to make simple pieces of household furniture and implements for the husbandmen. He would know the joy of a weary man's rest, the joy of planning things and having them turned out well. He would see the beauty of the wood and of the metal with which He worked, and the traces of His almighty power. There would be the joy of meeting people and sharing all the trials of village life. There would be a sweet courtesy to those who employed Him. For the men of Nazareth were a contemptible race. Their whole character shows that. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

We all know the pride we have when we do something well. You must not say it was easy for Him. Remember, He had to learn His trade. I should say He would spoil many things, but He never made others suffer. He was made perfect—growing in wisdom and stature, and every article turned out by Him was divine workmanship, done in the very best way He could. One flaw, one overcharge, one broken promise, would have destroyed His claim to Godhead.

Was it a trial for Him to wait on? I do not think so. He was not ready. He had to learn more of life.

So passed thirty years of preparation, and when He returned to teach and to bless those Nazarenes they were offended. He offered everlasting life but they would have none of it. They would not accept His love. He could do no mighty works. No wonder He marvelled.

SERVANT AND BROTHER

JUDE 1. PSALM LXXIII. 23-24.

"Jude the servant of Jesus Christ."

THERE is the same vehemence about Jude that we see in James. They were men whose words were like sledgehammers—as if the zeal of God's house consumed them.

It was true what Simeon said to Mary, "A sword shall pierce thine own heart." She held fast to Christ and her other children cast her off. She had great hopes. She expected Him to be a king, and the day she saw herself bereft of Him saw her bereft of them also. The Son with whom she had cast in her lot, who had come riding in triumph into Jerusalem on the Sabbath, was crucified between two malefactors on the Friday. No woman's faith had ever been so tried. Chosen by the Holy Spirit, she had apparently now no house nor home, and if there never was joy like hers when she began to understand the mystery of God and knew that her Son was God Incarnate, she must have felt that other and greatest of all earthly sorrows—sons who would not own her for their mother. The measure of her joy and honour was the measure of her shame and sorrow.

But it is apparent that soon after the Ascension James and Jude believed in Christ. It was only to

one of them that He appeared, doubtless to the eldest, and the eldest brought the younger ones. There must have been some weeks when Jude and his mother never spoke—when his door was shut against her—when he despised her for her devotion to the Son who had so far not only proved false, as he thought, to every hope, but had also brought shame upon them all. Jude can never forget that. Now he is like one who having been silent too long will henceforth speak in season and out of season. There will never be doubt about his testimony from this time henceforth. Further, he is like a witness brought in as the court rises, who cannot get saying all he would like to say ; there are, as it were, but five minutes left—but he will make the most of them.

Jude in his epistle does not call himself the brother of the Lord—not because he has forfeited that title, but because he thinks of Christ most of all as a risen and exalted Lord. It is always difficult to keep the two views of Christ in their proper place. We are tempted to deny His manhood—the first disciples to deny His Godhead, because they had seen Him, His family, His sleep, His tears, His shame and His blood. A weak man would have spoken of the relationship—neither James nor Jude does. They seem to fear to dishonour the greatness of their Lord.

A SIN UNTO DEATH

MARK III. 20-35. PSALM CII. 8.

"He that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness."

OUR Saviour had just chosen twelve disciples who should be with Him to be His companions in life, His comforters in sorrow, His fellow-workers and successors on earth and joint-heirs with Him hereafter. No sooner had He chosen those twelve than His own relations turned against Him and counted Him mad; and then the scribes who had come down from Jerusalem, though they saw His miracles of healing and admitted that He cast out devils, spoke against Him and said He was in league with Satan. Was that not a terrible hour for our Saviour? He had from all eternity been planning our salvation, hastening forward to that time when He should vanquish the devil, *and all for us*. Yet they said, "He hath a devil." How wonderful was Christ's forbearance! He might have smitten them with a stroke of the hand, but instead He reasons with them. And what does He try to prove? That He was not a devil. Might we not well say, "Be astonished, O ye heavens, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, at this"—that the Son of God had to argue He was not a devil but was indeed our Saviour, the enemy

of every enemy of ours. And in His love He shows us our danger. There is a time when He will no longer call, and those arms that have been stretched out from all eternity will be withdrawn.

It is a good sign to be afraid of having committed this sin. The devil puts thoughts into our heads to curse the Holy Ghost and we often fear we may have cursed that Holy One against our will or even unconsciously. But it is not so. The fatal step is a deliberate one. The temptations of the devil are not sins of ours till we have trifled with them and yielded to them. The sin against the Holy Ghost consists in a deliberate rejection of Christ and His mercy. These scribes came all the way from Jerusalem. They saw Christ's miracles but they perverted their meaning and nature, making them the ground of their enmity against God. They were in danger of sinning against the Holy Ghost. There is an awful passage in John's Epistle—"There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it." A man may be a profane swearer or a drunkard and yet he may be saved in spite of that; but he cannot be saved if he rejects Christ and despises salvation.

I pray you to remember the Apostle Paul's words: "Lest I myself should be a castaway." I can wish you nothing better in life than that you should have this fear; that you should work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; that you should watch and pray, fleeing from the wrath to come.

DOING WELL TO OURSELVES

GALATIANS VI. 9. PSALM LXXXIV. 7.

"And let us not be weary in well-doing."

IT is not easy to keep on doing well to ourselves. Take a man who has fallen into sin, who has sunk very low, and by God's grace turns over a new leaf, gives up what was his greatest pleasure—if not the only pleasure, and leads a sober life. He perseveres for long, fights against himself night and day; every street is a temptation; every companion a tempter; every place he goes to is polluted with awful memories; he wrestles with flesh and blood as well as with principalities and powers. And then comes a reaction, and he loses heart. A great many things account for it. His old companions laugh at him, and there's nothing harder to answer than a sneer; his friends jibe at him; they say his repentance will not last long; he had repented often before now—but wait till next Saturday or next "Fair!"

One could expect the people of God at least would welcome and cheer him on. I do not mean that they are to go and remind him of his sin, and tell him they are glad he is not the scoundrel he once was, but to give him a kind, friendly word and a pleasant glance. A very little kindness would hearten a sinner sometimes, but often he feels overlooked, slighted, or suspected. A

sinner can run away from his old companions, he can put up with the absence of his elder brother, but what if his father does not come to meet him ? God does not seem to welcome him. Sin still has a hold of him. It is no use trying to be better. He will give it up.

Now I do tell you that the believing sinner is made more welcome than he thinks. His companions who jeer at him admire him. The people of God, in spite of their coldness and seeming carelessness, bless God in their heart because of him—at least some of them do. But however little men may welcome him, the eternal God receives him with open arms. Is it not something even for one week or one month to have conquered the devil ? Is it nothing to be stronger in body, firmer in mind, gentler in heart ? Is it nothing to have earned no reproaches, to have stopped tears, to have planted hope ? Is it not good to know you will not be tempted beyond what you are able to bear ? Is it not good to be driven back on God, to feel the power of sin, and be compelled to take hold of the Everlasting Arms ? Have you not even now a harvest of joy—to say nothing of that harvest that shall never end ?

DOING WELL TO OTHERS

GALATIANS VI. 9. PSALM XXXVII. 3.

"Let us not be weary in well-doing."

IT is not easy to keep on doing well to people. It is hard work. A great many people think they are engaged in well-doing when they are simply trifling. Well-doing needs all the heart and soul and strength and mind. If a man is tempted it is not well-doing to say to him, "You should not do that"; to speak with an air of superiority, as if you were far above him, and just wishing to be able to say you had been trying to do good. No—it means that you will reason with him as one who fears to use a wrong argument; that you will give up time, surrender a holiday—many a holiday, spend weary hours, spend hard-earned money, pray, be abused by him, love him so much that his sin cuts you to the very heart, and in fact never halt trying to help him till he is saved or dead. And all this time apparently get no thanks! be told to mind your own business! be counted meddlesome and suspicious! And even harder to bear will be the questions and the sneers of godly people who do not know what you are doing and put the worst construction on everything you say. Yes, and after all, when months and years have gone by, you

may see all your labour go evidently for nought, the dog returning to his vomit.

Why should we not get weary in well-doing? I need not remind you that that is just what we are here for—just the very thing for which we exist, and the very thing for which God exists. What else will you do? What pleasure is to be compared with this, the only work in the universe on which you can employ all your strength?

You are weary of it—ah, remember how much wearier they are who have to suffer. You count it a trial to go and spend an hour, to see those you are trying to help, silent, sulky and unthankful: what have they to suffer who are bound hand and foot to them, and who see them, not silent, but outrageous, cruel, murderous? Think what the poor wretch himself bears who is tormented by the memory of the past, the fear of the future, and the shame of the present, whose whole life is but an effort to get out of himself. Think of what God and the angels endure, who see sin night and day, who never can get quit of it, who see the fearful looking-for of judgment.

Why weary, when you look at the good it does yourself? Have you not found that when you were trying to do good to others you got most good yourself; when you were compelled to speak to a man you needed clean hands; when you had an errand to God you needed a pure heart?

THE CHRISTIAN'S VITAL BREATH

COL. IV. 2. PSALM CIX. 4.

"Continue in prayer."

NEVER stop praying. Some of us have never begun. Most of us do not continue. We find no pleasure in it. Pray till it becomes a pleasure. Christ had not a moment to spare, and yet He prayed whole nights. It may shorten your time, but it blesses what is left. We pray along with Christ, and Him the Father heareth always; all His prayers are answered. There are two questions we do well to ask: How much time do I really spend in prayer? Is it getting longer or shorter? Just as it is good for us to keep an account of the money we give away—not for pride, but to see if we are doing all we ought to do, so it might be well to count up the exact time we spend in prayer and ask ourselves if in any sense it can be called "continuing," "watching." Many of us find the physical attitude painful. We can stand, or sit, or walk for hours, but we cannot kneel. We have not practised it. Prayer is a thing we dare not omit, but not a thing we look forward to with pleasure.

Perhaps to "continue in prayer with thanksgiving" means first of all actual delight in it. There is no apparent thanksgiving in Christ's prayer in the garden, "Let this cup pass from Me." Yet He had gone to

Gethsemane singing a psalm, strengthened by thanksgiving, and even in the act of prayer itself there was a joy and trust and longing to come near to God.

There should be contemplation of past mercies. Looking back on life we see multitudes of things we never blessed God for, or if we did, we did not see the full meaning of the mercy at that time.

There should be thanksgiving for faith in the mercies that lie in the future. If the worst come to the worst the storm will not last always. The eternal weight of glory will come all the quicker if our troubles increase.

We are to pray for others and with them. The fight may seem for a moment to go against us where we are, but if we saw Christ conquering we would smile through our tears.

When we pray, Christ not only as God hears our prayers, but as the God-man He joins us in prayer as One who has the same desires, and is as much concerned for the answer as we are. And in this work of prayer He will, with all His people, be engaged throughout eternity, for prayer just means communion with God. This is the believer's privilege and the believer's necessity. There is always some thing to pray for—himself, the world, the ages to come. By no possibility can a man ever sit down and say, " I have enough, I have got all I wanted," for then one could not possibly be a joint-heir with Christ.

CONVERTING A SOUL

JAMES V. 19-20. PSALM LI. 11-15.

" Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

THESE words are the last in this Epistle and they come in with a strange abruptness. The words have certainly no connection whatever with what goes before; but they are words from the heart—last words. The writer always speaks as if he remembered his own words, " For what is your life? It is even a vapour." It is as if, when James came to the conclusion of his Epistle, God had told him he had but one more sentence to write, and he writes the thing that lies nearest his soul.

Christianity alone makes that word " brethren " possible. It would cause a laugh were it used at public meetings by any other than a minister. That is the glory which the Christian is to have in eternity—he will be the friend and companion for ever and ever of all the children of God. There is nothing to correspond to that in the world's hopes and feelings. There may be interest and admiration, and wonder and respect, but not holy love.

What is James's last advice?, It is to carry on the work he himself has been engaged in; and this

work is the converting of a sinner. Unhappily that has often been made a matter of personal pride. Men have been anxious to be able to reckon up their converts and get the glory to themselves, forgetting the million influences that have been at work upon those converts. As it is the most glorious of all works, so it is the most difficult. The man who would convert a soul must be willing to forget himself and see himself passed by. He must toil for days and years, never forgetting the task he is engaged in, and he must watch narrowly his own life, not only to hinder the effects of an ungodly example, but to put himself more and more in tune with the work, looking always and only to Jesus Christ.

To " hide a multitude of sins " does not mean that we are to be saved because we have been the means of saving the soul of another. To imagine that our prayers, or our penance, or our good deeds, or our high moral character, can save us is to show our ignorance of ourselves, our distance from God, and our contempt for Christ and His redemption. James's meaning is that the one who is the means of turning back a soul from its apostasy, is to rejoice in this, that that soul has been saved from spiritual ruin and the multitude of its sins covered up and forgiven. We may be the instruments in this great work, but the glory is Christ's, through whose blood all sin is forgiven.

SERMONS IN STONES

JOHN XIX. 13. PSALM XXII. 11.

"A place called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha."

IT has been said that life consists in finding out the meaning of a few simple words. Take the name "Tolbooth," a place associated with the payment of market dues and all the peaceableness of commerce. To us it means a place where the martyrs' heads were fixed, where the men of Edinburgh allowed them to remain fixed for years. Could there be a word with more peaceful associations than the "Grassmarket?" It calls up all the charm and stir of country life, the meeting of farmers and herdsmen and shepherds, the lowing of cattle and the bleating of sheep, the mirth, the frolic and humour of the Fair, but to one who knows a little history it calls up a vision of a crowd of 20,000 men and women—some angry, some curious, many weeping, others laughing—heads seen at every window, spectators clambering over the roofs of houses, all gazing towards one point. And there you see a saint of God trying above the tumult to speak a word for Him. It is the voice of a martyr, condemned by law to die for witnessing for Christ's royal rights and prerogatives—"glorifying God in the Grassmarket."

Take the word "Pavement." How much history is crystallised in it! It was the place where the Son

of God was condemned to die. The meanings of all words are known to Him who is the Word Incarnate, to whom all histories are known, yet one meaning in special will it have for Him for ever and ever.

What does the word "pavement" suggest to us? It recalls the days of childhood, of children playing in the streets. It calls up city life, it is a word associated with civilisation. The Romans won their title to the gratitude of the world because of the wonderful roads they made. But there lay the tragedy of Jewish life. There were Romans in Jerusalem and that tesselated pavement of coloured marbles was an evidence of their dominion there. Yet in that very pavement there was a casting up of a highway for the heralds of the Cross.

We know that Roman Governors carried about their tribunals with them. There ought to be a certain dignity and ceremony about a court, for the judge represents God. The court was held out of doors. That is one of the fundamental laws of justice, one of its attributes—that all must be carried on in open day, before the eye of men. Christ stood where many were passing lightly by—condemned to die unanimously by Jewish and by Roman law; but "of the people there was none with Him."

As we pass along the street, stepping lightly off and on the pavement, let us remember we are on holy ground. The very stones cry out, "Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

THE FATHER'S HOME-CALL

REV. XXI. 2. PSALM LXXXVII. 1-3.

" I saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem."

To the Jew the temple had been the visible memorial of a glorious past and the sign of a still more glorious future. The Apostle John had spent wondrous hours there alone, and also with Christ. He is now an old man when God shows him the New Jerusalem, and strange to say, there is no temple therein. A Jerusalem without a temple ! We all remember the time of our childhood. If we returned now, we can comprehend our grief if we found everything but the one thing we loved most—the thing that had made home home. " I saw no temple therein." That shows us that what we counted best on earth will have no place in heaven, because we shall have better things. We shall not love our friends less ; we shall love them more, but all the redeemed will be ours, one family in God. And there will be a bond of perfect love.

" The bright, the morning star." This is the last description of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Bible. It occurs in a passage of surpassing grandeur, which gives such a description of the glory of heaven as might surely appeal to anyone. It means that with us it is night time ; but if we have Christ the worst of the night is passed. And it means not only that there

shall be a morning, but that it cannot be long till it comes. When we look steadily at Christ the longest time of trial is but the few short hours before the eternal dawn breaks.

" And the Spirit and the Bride say, ' Come.' " All the attributes of the Three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—all that God has ever said or done—all His desires—are summed up and find utterance in that homely word, that infinitely loving command, that beseeching, imploring cry, " Come." And if the Bride, that is, the saints in glory, could speak to us—the saints who know what death is and what heaven is, and who understand difficulties about God which we imagine to be insuperable—their one cry from morning to night, from the beginning of the year to the end, from our first moment to our last, would be, " Come ! Come to the marriage supper of the Lamb ! " And God, by His very asking us to come, pledges Himself, and all He is, and all He has, to make us willing, if we desire it.

Malachi was God's last word to the Jews for 350 years, and in that book we read, " The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple." Turn over the leaf, and you have " The book of the generation of Jesus Christ." So, too, the New Testament closes with Christ's words, " I come quickly." Between us and that second and last coming, how thin the veil ! Happy, happy are they who are ready and can say, " Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

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